

# ***JUMP CUT***

**A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA**

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# Table of Contents

Jump Cut, no. 3, September-October 1974

Chinatown by James Kavanaugh  
Blazing Saddles by Daniel Golden  
Parallax View by Fred Kaplan  
Zardoz by Frederic Jameson  
Chinatown by Murray Sperber  
Phillip Marlowe films by William VanWert  
Nicholas Roeg films by Chuck Kleinhans  
Jean-Pierre Gorin interview by Christian Braad Thomsen  
Cine Manifest self-history by Eugene Corr and Peter Gessner  
Popcorn Venus reviewed by E. Ann Kaplan  
Zagreb animation festival report by O.W. Riegel

To navigate:

Other than the table of contents the links inside a PDF are active.

Use the bookmarks to the left on a PDF file. If they don't appear click the small ribbon icon on the left edge.

Search by using ctrl-F (PC) or command-F (Mac). Clicking "Edit" on the top ribbon will bring up a menu that also has a find function (PC or Mac).

If you're on the Archive website then use the "Search inside" field at the top right.

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# JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

## Chinatown

## Other places, other times

by James Kavanagh

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I wander thro' each charter'd street,  
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,  
And mark in every face I meet  
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

Roman Polanski's CHINATOWN is as powerful in its own way as William Blake's scathing portrait of earlier bourgeois society in the short poem, "London." In Polanski's work, the city which serves as the image of an entire social milieu is Los Angeles, with its own pathetic and dessicated river, and its own collection of scarred and frightened faces.

To some extent, TOWN is part of the recent Hollywood fascination with the near past. THE GREAT GATSBY attempts a lush recreation of the Twenties, while THE STING and CHINATOWN bring their audiences back their audiences back to the depression-ridden 30s. There are some common impulses behind all this nostalgia which are not especially difficult to trace. The *feel* of this nostalgia, the way it decorates the screen, the fascination with the elegant cars, the impeccable clothes, the deferent servants, the general aura of luxury and opulence—all these serve to satisfy a latent social yearning for those simpler times in this country when the rich were really *the* rich, and the rest were—well, the rest. It is not surprising that such visions should reappear as the specter of economic crisis once again threatens to rear its ugly head.

CHINATOWN accepts the need for a kind of "period" realism. The opening credits are done in vintage 30s black-and-white (really gray-on-gray). The nice clothes, nice car, and nice mansion are even more prominent here than in a movie like THE STING. The headline about Seabiscuit, and the pictures of FDR on the wall add the finishing touches. Even the look and feel of the movie—the mellow as opposed to plastic color, the style of the characters, the intricacies of the plot—create a mood reminiscent of Bogart's BIG SLEEP. But in CHINATOWN, all this detail is only a prerequisite to the film, not the

exhaustion of its content.

One should be forewarned that CHINATOWN's title is deceptive, since the film ignores any systematic depiction of the lower levels of society. Its hero is solidly middle-class. Its title becomes a controlling metaphor projected by the characters rather than a defined neighborhood projected on the screen. Yet, for all its inherent limitations, CHINATOWN represents the most progressive aspects of bourgeois realism. The film gives a deeper and more shattering vision of bourgeois society than much professedly radical political propaganda.

The plot of CHINATOWN is intricate and difficult to summarize. One is also reluctant to reveal too many of the key events of a "detective story." This is especially so in this case since some of the surprises add not just to plot suspense but also to the characters' emotional reality. Jack Nicholson plays J. J. Gittes, a private detective who is tricked into providing pictures of a supposed love nest for a smear campaign against the chief engineer of the Department of Water and Power, Hollis Mulwray. Mulwray has been resisting efforts to build an unsafe dam to provide more drinking water, even though L.A. is in the midst of a serious drought. After he is smeared in the papers, Mulwray is found dead in a reservoir, having apparently drowned after an accidental or suicidal fall. First Gittes, then the cops discover that Mulwray was murdered. Gittes has, in the meantime, discovered that it was not Mulwray's real wife (Faye Dunaway) who hired him but an imposter. Gittes is annoyed at having been used to set up Mulwray, and he decides to find out who was behind it.

As Gittes begins to poke around, he realizes he is confronting a pervasive and powerful source of corruption. First, in a shocking and bloody scene, Gittes has his nose slit open. Then he discovers that the drought was contrived. Thousands of gallons of water have been drained off into the ocean each night, and Mulwray realized this just before he died. Gittes finds that much of the "drought stricken" land in the valley has recently been bought by three or four people, all of whom live in the same old folks' home. Signs point to Noah Cross (John Huston), a rich and ruthless land baron who is Mulwray's father-in-law and ex-partner. Gittes becomes heavily involved with Mulwray's wife (Cross's daughter). The detective discovers that Mulwray's love nest was not what it seemed. In the penultimate scene, we learn who killed Mulwray. And in the last climactic scene, we are taken to Chinatown, where Gittes spent his haunting early days as a cop, to there confront the final, terrible power of the untouchable corruption which pervades the whole social atmosphere.

Nicholson as Gittes begins the film thinking of himself as a hardboiled, sophisticated investigator whose "metier", as he puts it, is marriage trouble. He has a certain sense of his own integrity and decency. In an early scene in a barbershop, a mortgage banker chides him for digging up other people's dirt. He defends himself furiously by insisting,

"I make an honest living. People come to me when they're in

desperate situations. At least I don't throw people out of their homes like you do ... I make an *honest* living."

Later, when Noah Cross asks Gittes if Lou Escobar, the police lieutenant in charge of the Mulwray murder, is honest, Gittes replies,

"He's honest, as far as it goes. Of course, he has to swim in the same water we all do."

In a film with so much thirst, drought, irrigation, and drowning, the water image is significant. Ironically, Gittes only vaguely begins to see that he too is a very little fish in some very muddy water. Nor does he have a very clear sense of the strength of the current he is swimming against. As Cross tells him further,

"You may think you know what you're dealing with, but believe me, you don't."

Gradually, the film exposes successively deeper levels of corruption, until Gittes discovers, at the core of it all, a figure whose rotten hand turns love into incest, abundance into deprivation, and friendship into murder, thereby connecting the themes of personal, familial, and social decadence. Gittes himself, then, is finally to be seen as an integral part of this complex, rotten, social whole. For the same unseen hand, which produces the competition, avarice, and aggression that gives Escobar and the police murders to solve, also produces the manipulated economic underdevelopment which gives the banker mortgages to foreclose. It produces, too, the distorted bourgeois family which gives Gittes "cheating" to uncover. These are the kinds of "honest living" for which bourgeois society provides.

It is through the women in the film that CHINATOWN projects its image of beauty. Faye Dunaway, as Mrs. Mulwray, has a certain jaded beauty. Dunaway's character needs careful acting, since she provides the cutting edge of the movie's tension; and, surprisingly, Dunaway is not found wanting. The young woman who was Mulwray's partner in the "love nest" casts an aura of youth and innocence. The violation and corruption of this beauty, which is gradually revealed to the viewer, become prime symptoms of the grotesque social decadence. We find the same figure behind the torturous personal and sexual relations in the film, as behind the torturous trail of political machination and social disruption. It is a rare film, indeed, which speaks of the father figure, the family, and incest in the same breath that it speaks of the capitalist, power, and contrived social anarchy.

The film's social decadence is portrayed without any illusion of mitigating circumstances, of the ultimate triumph of justice, or even of personal escape. Gittes, who has a certain naive hope that he could expose the big boys behind the murder and the drought by enlisting the aid of the newspapers or the cops, learns painfully that his social universe is closed. He finds he is trapped in a world of mediocre concerns and can never reach out to threaten the controlling hands of

the ruling class. When Gittes finds it hard to understand what the killer could hope to get beyond the millions that man already has, the answer which emerges is “the future.” The killer wants continued and extended control over the lives and fortunes of millions. And it is clearly capitalism which controls this social universe. We see a capitalism defined in the familiar terms of lust for power, private opposed to public control of resources, forced monopolization, land speculation, graft, private armies of henchmen, and financial control of politicians and cops. CHINATOWN is, in this sense, the perfect film for the Watergate era. It affirms the reality of corruption in capitalist society without promoting any illusory antidote in the form of effective individual or institutional outrage.

And what of Chinatown itself? Throughout the film we find Chinatown only in the glaze in Gittes’ eyes or the hesitation in his voice when he is reminded of the place where he and his fellow cops did “as little as possible.” Gittes seems barely able to cope with his Chinatown experience himself. He is totally unable to make it understandable to his middle class peers. The sense we get of the place from these indirect references is the sense of something utterly different. It is the sense of the past conveyed in E.P. Hartley’s line from THE GO-BETWEEN:

“The past is like another country; they do things differently there.”

As Gittes says of Chinatown: “You can’t always tell what’s going on.”

And, indeed, Chinatown and the kind of ghetto it represents—the underbelly of bourgeois society—will always be precisely the *other* place, a place outside of the universe of bourgeois discourse. In this sense, the film is only giving eloquent, if silent, testimony to its own limits as bourgeois art in its non-representation of the Chinese ghetto. Such a strategy is infinitely preferable to the facile accretion of sociological detail which pretends to but doesn’t capture the reality of poverty and oppression.

So when the film finally brings us to Chinatown, it is not to see what the place looks like or to learn the customs of the natives. It is rather to witness a scene of final destruction which affects the characters we have followed throughout. It leaves the Chinese faces in the background. There is blood in this last scene which is shocking and repulsive, but Polanski evidences great maturity by avoiding the temptation to linger over it. Instead of foregrounding the blood, he gives us an unmistakable glimpse which provides stark confirmation of the enormity and terrible finality of the social evil involved. It is this confirmation, rather than any obsession with blood, that powers the scene and exhausts the viewer.

Gittes’ partner mumbles, “Forget it, Jake, it’s Chinatown,” as he pulls Gittes away from the terrible human wreckage. Here Gittes learns that those places on the edge of his world which are so strange and frightening are ruled by the same forces which haunt his more comfortable world, infecting all its imagined beauty, and making

nightmares out of all its most cherished dreams. The killer in Gittes' world is its creator—the one who makes the rivers run where he wants, who is father of all the children, master of all the servants. His magic wand is money. With it he conjures up not only Chinatown, but L.A. present and future (the Valley). For Gittes, the place that was so *other* comes home with a fury. And for us, the place and time become metaphors for the here and now. It is only too clear that the same figure presides over our social universe.

The movie brings us, with Gittes, to the unsettling realization that we can't always tell what's going on, even in our comfortable middle class womb. The film indicates we must resign ourselves to our petty insignificance and follow a strategy for survival which directs that we do "as little as possible". Finally, then, CHINATOWN overwhelms us with a sense of hopelessness.

The closure of CHINATOWN's social universe is at once the best that bourgeois art can offer. At the same time it's a telling symptom of where the best bourgeois art falls short. The sense of futility and despair which the film promotes in its audience is relatively acceptable because the futility isn't grounded in cheap cynicism or cold detachment. Rather, it grows out of the character's involvement in the social world, an involvement which becomes progressively more painful, until it is finally shattering. The viewer shares this involvement all the way through and is not cheated because the suspense's resolution cancels out nothing that the viewer has felt. There is an uncompromised growth in the knowledge of social reality which the viewer shares with Gittes. It is this growth which leads to a sense of ultimate futility. Our emotional involvement in CHINATOWN does not require substituting any illusions for the destructive reality of social life.

It is in the implication of the capitalist father-figure's omnipotence and total immunity that we find the source of despair and the source of CHINATOWN's insufficiency as bourgeois art. Precisely because of its inability to comprehend (intellectually, emotionally, aesthetically) the experience of those who are the agents of historical change—the dispossessed working class—the film is unable to project change at all. Instead, it reproduces bourgeois society as a natural, rather than historical phenomenon. It seems to depict a phenomenon which always was and will be, rather than a product and continuing object of human activity. Thus, even the best bourgeois art sees the world from the waist up, projecting middle-class heroes (sometimes disguised as lumpen, but hardly ever working class) struggling against ruling class villains. At its worst, it spins a web of illusion in order to justify its heroes, while trying to convince its audience that it is representing something "real". At its best, it discerns some of the more complex contradictions in bourgeois social life. It may help us realize that there are "other" kinds of oppression even more frightening than those suffered by the male middle class, see some connection among different kinds of oppression, and put all this in relation to capitalism in a way that avoids creating illusory heroes, illusory victims, or illusory escapes.

CHINATOWN is an example of the most progressive aspects of bourgeois realism. Its insistence on the pervasiveness of the corruption of bourgeois life clear through to that sacred social core—the bourgeois family—forges a final link in the chain of oppression and perversion. It does so in a way that is reminiscent of that other unusually truthful moment in bourgeois art when Blake ended his poem with the stanza:

“But most thro’ midnight streets I hear  
How the youthful Harlot’s curse  
Blasts the newborn infant’s tear  
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

Arnold Kettle has some remarks about Blake’s poem that apply as well to Polanski’s film:

“We talk of the battle of ideas, of the power of the ideology of a class to be a weapon—even a deadly weapon—in its hands: but it is the power of this poem that it can give a content and intensity to phrases that are often a little abstract and theoretic.”

CHINATOWN strikes in the pit of the stomach with the sickening truth about personal and social relations’ utter depravity in a society where money is king. That the film remains bourgeois, that it gives no very clear sense of working class reality, that it cannot offer a more hopeful, more revolutionary vision—these are all criticisms which are undeniably accurate. But the same criticism also will remain undeniably hollow as long as they come from a left movement in the United States which has hardly begun to solve any of these problems for itself.

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[To top](#)   [Current issue](#)   [Archived essays](#)   [Jump Cut home](#)



### *Blazing Saddles* Heading 'em off at the cliché

by Daniel Golden

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Despite my own incorrigible taste for self-satire and parody in cinema and other art forms, I found myself bored and even irritated by much of *BLAZING SADDLES*, Mel Brooks third feature and his potshot at the Western genre film. It's hard to imagine Brooks as anything but a New York City Jewish intellectual. There are moments in this film when it becomes a private little universe of "in" jokes, Yiddishisms, and other ethnic allusions. All of Brooks' films remind me of Woody Allen's features and of *BYE, BYE, BRAVERMAN*, Sidney Lumet's fine comedy that was so imbued with its New York City milieu that it bombed everywhere west of the Hudson.

*BLAZING SADDLES* is a deliberate travesty of a genre that has done a pretty fair job of self-parody in recent years. The Western's chief attribute, its pious morality of violence, has been ironically undercut, deliberately by Sam Peckinpah and inadvertently by the producers of the gory Clint Eastwood-Spaghetti Western cycle. Most significantly, though, the sweeping exposure of the TV Western has made it practically impossible to take seriously the formulaic visions of pure and unsullied heroes, sniveling villains, and a society seemingly untroubled by moral equivocation and ambivalence. Moreover, the assiduous patterning of the Western plot to the 54 minute video hour has yielded up an audience that can predict incipient conflict and ultimate resolution by the appearance of expensive guest stars and the imminence of commercial cutaways. Early on, television even perpetrated its own mild self-mockery in the successful *Maverick* series, with Jim Garner as the handsome, charming, but insistently cowardly comic protagonist. I think that TV's pervasive influence has probably made it impossible to produce a straight Western. It has made the genre a dead horse, one that Mel Brooks, with all his gifts of wit and bad taste, cannot flog to life.

*BLAZING SADDLES* falls apart as a movie. Its generic mockery of the Western in stereotypes of plot and character is undercut by an

unfocused and indulgent hodgepodge of goofs and gags. In pacing and crosscutting, it most closely resembles a 90-minute version of a TV comedy skit. This is no accidental resemblance, since Brooks was instrumental in perfecting the TV take-off skit while writing for one of the earliest and funniest of comedy hours, the *Show of Shows*. But Brooks has shown better visual craftsmanship in his two earlier features, *THE PRODUCERS* and *THE TWELVE CHAIRS*. In *BLAZING SADDLES* the camera does a lot of over-panning and wide-angle elevated work in an attempt to mimic the big sky, big screen Western technique. But when Brooks moves in close for facial gesture and slapstick buffoonery, there are momentary pauses and visual stutters that work against the effect of one-liners and the accretion of quick sight gags.

The key problem, and the flaw that keeps *BLAZING SADDLES* from being consistently and insanely funny, is conceptual rather than visual. The film doggedly adheres to its own plot line, as if the audience ever expected the bad guys to win and the mythical town of Rock Ridge to be usurped by the familiar coalition of railroad robber barons and corrupt state officials. Thus, despite its joyful scatology and sexual innuendo, and some particularly fine offbeat acting, the film breaks down as we are forced to endure the mechanical clanking out of this ludicrous plot. Cleavon Little excels in the role of Sheriff Bart, a modern black hipster caught in a time warp. His saddle bags are by Gucci and his outfits are double-knit. Gene Wilder, who was so perfect as the foil for manic Zero Mostel in *THE PRODUCERS*, is once again endearing. This time he's the Waco Kid, a sodden former gunslinger who goes on the wagon to help Bart defeat the forces of evil. Together they manage to save the town from the clutches of fey Hedley LaMarr, played to the arched eyebrow by Harvey Korman, himself no stranger to the TV comedy sketch. The acting is strong down through the entire cast. It includes a gem of a performance by Madeline Kahn, who camps it up as Marlene-ish Lili Von Shtupp, torch singer in the town saloon. Complete with pout, lisp, and Merry Widow, the Teutonic Titwillow sings one of Brooks' original compositions. Among the other numbers composed for the film, Brooks makes an obvious bow to the theme from *HIGH NOON* in his song "Rock Ridge," and he even resuscitates Frankie Laine in all his twanginess to sing the title number.

Although Brooks allows his audience to anticipate a happy ending (here the victors ride off into the clichéd sunset in a Caddy Fleetwood), it takes too long to get us there. What we get along the way is funny enough, but arrhythmic and disjointed. Brooks digs up a plethora of old sight gags and blackout humor which, along with the low level obscenity, undercut the very plot they ostensibly comprise. There are some memorable scenes throughout, but the inexorable movement of the plot makes for an awkward and contrived pace.

I suggested that Brooks' TV background is noble and fecund comedic heritage. But like Woody Allen, he seems too easily seduced by the set piece, the cheap and easy laugh. Some of these cheap laughs are

genuinely funny, as in one early scene in *BLAZING SADDLES* when Little and his fellow black railroad workers are ordered to sing an oldtime spiritual. They confer and break into a bop-rumba version of Cole Porter's "I Get a Kick Out of You," complete with doowaahs and Mills Brothers' ballbearing harmonies. This is the first of many cheap comic incongruities in the film, but in its moment of surprise it is effective and undermines the expectations of the audience. Scarcely two minutes into *BLAZING SADDLES*, we are reminded that the joke is on us as well as on the genre.

Brooks builds a pattern of reverse anachronisms to jar audience and character alike into a recognition of the film's "reality." In *BLAZING SADDLES*, this mode is so outrageous that it practically obliterates the distinction between the images of a mythic West and Brooks' fraudulent, irreverent distortion. Instead of offering satire as wry tribute, Brooks would assert that the Western is an exhausted artifact of our cinematic culture, worthy only of put-on and put-down. Thus, as Hedley LaMarr, Korman moves through the film in exasperation, correcting all who would confuse him with Heddy. In trying to convince the Rock Ridge townsfolk to stand and fight, Sheriff Bart argues: "You'd do it for Randolph Scott." At that point all the people rise, doff their hats and bonnets, and chant reverentially to the true Western hero. The net effect of these and numerous other instances of comic reversal is to destroy an already shaky and undermined target, the myth of the Western. Inevitably, Slim Pickens, who does a good job of playing himself, suggests to Korman that they "head 'em off at the pass." The genre film has been devoured by its own banalities. All LaMarr can do is grimace, hold limp wrist to forehead and moan, "God, I hate that cliché!"

Mel Brooks does not shoot down the Western with sublimated affection for the genre. He is no Bogdanovich paying subtle and gentle tribute to styles and directors gone by (as in *PAPER MOON* and *THE LAST PICTURE SHOW*). Nor is his vision akin to Truffaut's Gallic mockery of self and cinema in *DAY FOR NIGHT*. Brooks mocks not only the Western but the entire realm of Hollywood moviemaking. The last five minutes of *BLAZING SADDLES* spills off the Western set. As the camera dollies out, we watch the street brawl interrupt a Berkleyesque dance number, replete with fountains, long staircases, and Dom DeLuise as a swishy director. The fight then moves to the Warner commissary for the required pie fight. Finally it's off the studio lot entirely, ending up at Grauman's Chinese Theatre where the feature is, of course, *BLAZING SADDLES*. Here, amid the hokum and tinsel of the Hollywood scene, Bart guns down Hedley LaMarr, who has paused to marvel at Douglas Fairbanks' tiny footprints. All that is left is for Gene Wilder to observe, "Wow, you shot the bad guy." The movie within a movie chases its own tale over the horizon. But *BLAZING SADDLES* is just too sloppy and self-indulgent, despite its burlesque of its own fictive world. If the satire of the Western genre is botched, it is because Brooks sticks to a plot that can only dull the malicious blade of irony and mockery. There are lots of laughs, even for non-New Yorkers, but there's too much *shtick*.

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[To top](#)   [Current issue](#)   [Archived essays](#)   [Jump Cut home](#)

### *Parallax View* Political paranoia

by Fred Kaplan

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The conspiracy crazies are coming into their own. The phenomenon of a widely disparate, independently acting faction of mankind setting out to concoct the wildest intrigues involving usurpation of power—usually by “them” against “us”—is, in this country, as old as the Republic. In the rest of the world, it’s as aged a pedagogical source of ideological energy as Western civilization itself. The Jews, the Catholics, the Masons, bankers, Britons, Communists, intelligence agencies, foreign powers — all these and numerous others have been hoisted up on the political stockade as Manichean whipping boys at various, and explicable, moments in history.

The latest chapter in this fascinating chronicle is, at heart, the same old story. But here there’s something of a peculiar twist involved: a basic and fundamental distrust of, disillusionment with, and alienation from, the U.S. government as a whole. It is seen as an absolute evil, not because of subversion by alien elements, but because of the ignominy of the United States itself and all that it stands for. The great demarcation line marking the beginning of this new paranoia can be drawn at the point of the JFK assassination. It began almost immediately after the event or the Warren Commission’s report. Then such theses as those by Mark Lane, Thomas Buchanan, Jim Garrison and a stack of others began to attract the hearts and minds of a growing portion of the book-reading population who sensed something fishy about the entire affair. The trend intensified when several leftist magazine editors, nightclub comics, other fringe social commentators, and finally, perhaps just as a curiosity item, the general mass press picked up the ball. Urged on by the Vietnam trauma, revelations regarding the CIA, and a growing social malaise and tension, the more “committed” of this faction took the Great Leap and began disseminating to their receptacle of similarly-minded subscribers numerous speculative “scenarios” involving conspiracy and collusion of all sorts. Now, with Watergate, urban crises, a growing sense of insecurity, cynicism and lack of confidence regarding most of our major institutions, the time is ripe. Conspiracy theorists—the

scholarly and the shoddy—have found time, space and popular response on such otherwise ostensibly apolitical media as afternoon TV talk shows and the Hollywood movie screen.

The most blatant manifestation of this milieu can be seen in the film, *EXECUTIVE ACTION*. Not a disguised fiction hidden behind veils of pseudonyms, this is a scenario of the JFK assassination itself. On paper, it's a heavyweight project, written by Dalton Trumbo from a book by conspiracy freaks Mark Lane (*Rush to Judgment*) and Donald Freed (*The Glasshouse Tapes*), directed by David Miller, who helped out Trumbo in his blacklisted days.

The film itself, on the other hand, is a total fiasco. It is so improbable, so filled with holes, so negligent even in the task of raising good, hardcore questions. Even if there were a conspiracy, I doubt if its schemers have much to worry about here. According to the collaborators, the assassination was spearheaded by a handful of rightwing Big Businessmen who feared that JFK was going to strike the oil-depletion allowance, enforce strong antitrust laws, incite black revolution, sign a test ban treaty, and pull out of Vietnam. With all these threats to this power elite's position and ideology (C. Wright Mills spins in his grave again), the only possible course of action—it is taken for granted—is "Executive Action," i.e., assassination of The Executive. And who are they going to get to pull off this intrigue? Well, the CIA recently fired some Cuban trainees as a result of the Bay of Pigs scandal; they're available, and can be bought ...

And on it goes. Much of this is based on two of the earliest and most nonsensical conspiratorial writings on the subject: the oil business in Buchanan's *Who Killed Kennedy* (the assassin leader being a wealthy oilman named Mr. X who wanted to test the limits of his power), the assertion of a sharpshooting double for Oswald in Richard Popkin's *The Second Oswald*. (Popkin teaches a philosophy of history course at Washington University which, so a student there tells me, might as well be entitled, "Tales of Intrigue," the entire expanse of world history taking on conspiratorial overtones at every significant juncture.)

There are whoppers all through this movie. Perhaps the biggest begins to strike us ten minutes through the plot. Namely, these businessmen (squintingly sinister and coldly unidentified) have many connections and great power, enough to pull together a grand conspiracy and an equally magnificent cover-up, stealing civil defense code books and disconnecting the D.C. phone lines to get the gunmen out of the country, and knocking off 18 witnesses to keep it hushed up. Thus one would think that they'd also be able to bargain for group-interest privileges, as they have throughout modern history, without having to resort to such risky dealings.

There are also a fair share of half-truths in all this, and loose ends trip things up too. Ruby's role in the plot is equivocally presented, and the Officer Tipitt shooting is very weakly explained. And what about those eighteen witnesses? Who were they? What did they witness? Trumbo

and Miller don't get bogged down in details; they simply ignore them.

But it's all a cop-out anyway. The film opens with a disclaimer that this scenario is, in effect, just a "maybe." And director David Miller has said in interviews, "We have no proof that these people in the film did it. The only thing we are trying to prove is that one man could not have accomplished this feat." The most dismal failure of EXECUTIVE ACTION, then, is that, in fact, Miller & Co. present no persuasive, much less compelling, evidence leading to this conclusion either. Strip away all the leftwing fantasy, and there is nothing remaining that would be inconsistent with the theory that Oswald did it alone.

Still, variations on the same theme are on their way. The first to follow is THE PARALLAX VIEW, craftily directed by Alan J. Pakula, starring and financially backed (in part) by Warren Beatty—who also had a heavy hand in MICKEY ONE, that classic of the paranoid thriller genre. PARALLAX VIEW is a well-made film, with fine acting, solid visual technique, and a genuine feel for suspense. In another spirit, it could have made a nifty spy adventure tale in the tradition of THE IPCRESS FILE or a gruesome satire the likes of OUR MAN IN HAVANA. Regrettably, its makers opted for what Richard Hofstadter once dubbed "the paranoid style in American politics." What we end up with is another item that blatantly exploits the JFK phenomenon. In this case, at the same time it also tends to induce a frightening paranoia in the minds of conspiracy buffs, pseudo-Marxists, and all types of people who, confused throughout their lives, find in such conspiracy-hatching a simultaneous scapegoat and a release hatch that provide both a confirmation of their ingrained insecurity and an easily-grasped version of a "meaning to it all." More than this, the film ultimately fails to provide any viably political substance, nothing even to stimulate rational debate, discussion, or provocative contemplation.

The film begins with a good, liberal, Kennedy-type Senatorial candidate assassinated on top of Seattle's Space Needle while giving July 4th speech. We see that there was a second assassin involved. An investigative commission, in a sequence presented in such a way as to make us feel that the court has convened in the darker pits of hell, concludes that the assassin was one lone nut. Three years later, it becomes apparent that people who were up there on the Needle that day are now being systematically knocked off because they are possible witnesses to what really happened. Beatty plays one of the attendants, a brash young newspaper reporter who at first dismisses those who cite conspiracy as explanation. But after he begins to smell something rotten about the fact that seven people who were up there have died already, he becomes a true believer. Especially important, he discovers that the whole thing is being run by the Parallax Corporation, an organization that hires certain psychological types (primarily anal-retentive in the extreme) as professional assassins, and then has them kill off select individuals in ways that make the victims' deaths seem unplanned.

Those whom we see killed (or, in one case, almost killed) are, except for

the possible witnesses, political candidates. However, nothing truly political is made of this. The candidates are, one supposes, variously liberal. Their views are never expressed, except on such vague, catch-all categories as “freedom,” “democracy,” and so forth. Likewise, the Parallax Corporation seems to be a mere assassination services organization, not necessarily rightwing or exclusively political in complexion. (It’s a big corporation, with East and West coast branches. If its sole function were to kill liberal politicians, one would think, there wouldn’t be very many liberal politicians left.) Additionally, in what appears to be a mouthpiece-spoken speech, delivered by the Beatty character to his skeptical editor, it is stated that the Corporation is probably not a CIA or FBI outfit, and that the investigation by the Commission wasn’t a deliberate cover up. However, at the end, Beatty is thought to be the assassin of a political candidate at a rally rehearsal. While running away, he’s machine-gunned down by a Parallax Corporation employee who’s waiting for him. Then we cut to a cold long shot of the same nearly faceless and soulless Commission that we saw in the beginning. The Commission’s Chief again pronounces the same conclusion of the group’s “rigorous” search into the matter, opining that Beatty was a lunatic in search of publicity. He then exhorts the press not to indulge in conspiracy-crying antics, and he adjourns the conference, no questions please. The Chief, we note, says nothing about Beatty’s being killed; so it seems that the Commission is part of a cover-up. But this jells with nothing else in the film. We get no sense of motivation, reason, or logic in its presentation.

In short, in both its general conception and in particular details, the men who made this film didn’t know what the hell they were trying to accomplish. As in the EXECUTIVE ACTION disaster, there is no sense here of political dynamics. We know nothing about the makeup, structure, origin, or purpose of the Parallax Corporation—nor anything about the investigative Commission. One is tempted to guess that such nebulosity was deliberately calculated, so that whatever scenario the neurotic viewer might have in mind (the “corporate dictatorship,” CIA pervasiveness, infiltration of Organized Crime, perverted power elite, what have you), such a vision would be confirmed in the beholder’s mind.

But this hypothesis is doubtful, since the film is so obviously unplanned on other grounds. For example, it is absurd that the corporation waits three years to get at the two big journalists up on the Needle, since they are probably the most accessible witnesses of all. It is even more improbable that, when Beatty, under an assumed name, applies for membership in the Corporation, nobody recognizes him. On the same line, it is at best confusing that someone from PC is sent to poison Beatty’s editor, who is just coming to believe in a conspiracy. This would not happen unless they knew that the Beatty character had convinced the editor—in which case they would know who Beatty is, in which case they, obviously, would not have let him into the Corporation.

But noxious is the only word for THE PARALLAX VIEW’s implications.



The Kennedy allusions are obvious. It's implied that the PC has killed off all sorts of people, including most of the important political figures assassinated recently. The 18-witnesses routine recalls the JFK assassination "plot." The political pretensions are slammed down our throats from start to finish. The inference drawn is that Lee Harvey Oswald, Jack Ruby, James Earl Ray, Sirhan Sirhan and who knows how many others might have been—and there is that eternal tease copout: *might have been*—hired by some similar agency, the nature and *raison d'être* of which are ... Unknown.

But if the internal logic of the film serves as any indication, it is improbable that these quite logical conclusions even occurred to anyone involved in the film's production. Which leads to a basic question: Why was *THE PARALLAX VIEW*—and for that matter, why was *EXECUTIVE ACTION*—made? The answer seems fairly clear: Money. In this social climate, an audience for such rampant, illogical, unrealistic, paranoia-drenched entertainment exists. Indeed, *EXECUTIVE ACTION* was being rejected by all the studios—until Watergate flashed its way onto the television sets of millions and the front pages of every newspaper in the land. The box-office potential for such fare suddenly zoomed upward. As *EXECUTIVE ACTION*'s producer, Gary Horowitz, said, that made all the difference. In other words, these films are merely playing on the highly volatile sentiments of the time. Not in any rational or even truly relevant fashion, mind you—the films explain nothing about Watergate or any other political phenomenon—but simply for its own grubby sake.

And so, in this time of crisis, the conspiracy craze is being bolstered. As in most other times, there are superficial and extremely shaky foundations upon which conspiratorial scenarios can rest. There are plots in government, corporations do indulge in duplicity and intrigue, all these things in all their complexity appear highly mysterious to the general public. The paranoid mentality, however, is one that observes these general trends. Then, feeling surrounded and enclosed by them, the neurotic hysterically exaggerates the potency of the forces involved so that the paranoid himself won't feel as insignificant as he truly is. He proceeds to construct his "evidence" into a single, all-encompassing chain or pattern so that, finally, he feels superior to all the evil in the world, having exposed its underground roots. This reasoning requires several sometimes wild leaps into the imagination. Yet the paranoid is dexterous enough to keep the discourse on such a level as to make it all seem perfectly logical to those who feel equally insecure in life. As Hofstadter commented,

"The distinguishing thing about the paranoid style is not that its exponents see conspiracies or plots here and there in history, but that they regard a 'vast' or 'gigantic' conspiracy as *the motive force* in historical events. History is a conspiracy, set in motion by demonic forces of almost transcendent power."

The whole notion of these vast conspiracies, as Mills and others have

pointed out, is an unnecessary and misleading trifle. Social ills are manifestations of a social system, a power structure whose elites help shape and dominate social values through mutual sets of common interest, and by dint of similar backgrounds and training. This neither necessitates nor logically implies the notion, or even the efficacy, of conspiratorial assassination as a means of domination. To think that a few people in a single power core run the world, is to engage in mindless personality-politics, in short, to take an opiate.

But such is precisely the nature of these two films. In *EXECUTIVE ACTION*, the focal point of all power is traced to a small number of absolutely evil and omnipotent oil men. In *THE PARALLAX VIEW*, the audience is shown that anyone can be shot down at any moment, and this due to an anonymous, impersonal, fascistic Corporation whose offices exist somewhere up there in one of those tall skyscrapers that loom over the lone individual with such intimidation already.

The difference between this new wave of paranoia and most of the others that have come and gone is that, in the mid-20th century, we find that an exploitive mass medium (for the first time in the history of widespread paranoid sentiment) composes or copies ideas from the paranoid mentality and being tosses them out on display to a literate public. And that public is now attuned to and readily mobilized by several mass media, crowded in urban centers where neurotic patterns of behavior are naturally conducted, living without the assurance of a tomorrow, much less a hereafter. Further appeals to this atomized state of being can, if anything, only exacerbate tension and insecurity. Such films tend to confuse, frustrate and pamper, rather than attempt to clarify, enlighten and change. Such a political cinema in this country remains on this level of wanton non-thinking, with scare tactics and oversimplification spelled out as the name of the game. As long as it does so, it can make no contribution to enhancing the conditions of this country's political reality. Indeed, if the terms of these films are taken as an assumption, any action by the viewer will only be in vain. The viewer will but be making footprints in the clouds.

### History and the death wish: *Zardoz* as open form

by Fredric Jameson

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Does ZARDOZ mean anything? And even if it does, even if we manage to disengage some relatively coherent “statement” from this complicated entanglement of plot and image, is it just possible that such a statement or message might be diluted beyond all recognition by the medium’s own sensory overload? Is it possible, in other words, that conceptual meaning knows some weakened status in the movie house, compared to the authority it exercises in a purely verbal text? Are abstract ideas, somehow neutralized by the weight of the present and the intensity with which we stare at the sheer narcotic flux of the screen’s materials?

If we think about ZARDOZ in a “literary” way, at any rate, the action of the film is evidently designed to make two distinct philosophical points, not necessarily related to each other. On the one hand, Boorman seems to have set out to redramatize an idea of religion essentially developed by Enlightenment thinkers: namely, that all religious belief is a superstitious mystification perpetuated by a cruel and repressive apparatus of priests and oppressors. Think, for instance, of the Marquis de Sade’s remark, characteristic of the whole Age of Reason in this respect: “The invention of the idea of God is the only crime I cannot find it in myself to pardon mankind.” So Zed’s murder of the “puppet master”—which at first strikes us as the bloody lust to destroy an ignorant savage—little by little comes to take on the heroic value of a gesture of human liberation.

Yet what is tantalizing and “estranging” about Boorman’s version of the theme is the way in which, in his vision of a distant future which has forgotten its own past, alongside the great forerunners in the battle against the *infâme*, alongside Voltaire and the *Encyclopédie*, the dog-eared illustrated pages of the *Wizard of Oz* itself take their place! A quite different notion of the virulence and the unexpectedly active revolutionary power even of such a very modest cultural artifact than in Kubrick’s cynical demonstration in *A CLOCKWORK ORANGE*, of the indifferent reinforcement by classical music of whatever activity it

happens to be associated with rape, murder, torture and the like. (It is true that in both films there is an implicit rebuke to “high” bourgeois culture—the stuffy image of the Beethoven bust is invoked in the service of the inhumane, while genuine enlightenment emerges, not from the great philosophers and poets, but from a chance reading of J. Frank Baum.)

I suppose that in the relatively secularized world of U.S. capitalism, with its denominational “tolerance” and its anodyne Protestant sects, the attack on superstition may be difficult to recognize for the powerful revolutionary motif it has been throughout Western history, in the emergence of a secular middle-class state from the pre-rationalistic values of the feudal era. Its practical lesson is inscribed, indeed, not in recent U.S. experience, but in the sorry failures of national and revolutionary movements in our own time from Ireland to Islam, which have shaken off foreign domination only to remain the voluntary prisoners of their own backward and ignorant local religions. In countries like these, the anticlerical passion, the struggle against the habits of hierarchy and obedience taught by religious doctrines, is a life-and-death issue. But in the United States it seems a dim memory, anachronistically evoked in ritualistic debates about federal aid to parochial schools. Yet I would think that the very real power of this part of Boorman’s film can be fully appreciated only when understood as part of that older Enlightenment tradition. Only think of the stone head itself, as it hovers over groveling populations, soaring against a vacant blue sky like the very revelation of the sacred itself in some simplified and more fundamental universe.

This theme is thus progressive, but it is attenuated in its ideological effect. Neither of these things can be said about ZARDOZ’s other major thesis, namely the alleged relation between nature and morality, and the claim that human beings need death in order to realize some genuinely human existence. This thought, however doubtful its ideological connotations, can boast whatever degree of philosophical respectability you may desire, from Heidegger’s “being-unto-death” to Robert Ardrey’s assertion of man’s killer instinct. Here we have a dramatization of that motto from the *Satyricon* which Eliot used as his motto for *The Waste Land*:

“I once saw the Sybil of Cumae hanging in a bottle, and when the boys asked her, ‘Sybil, what do you want?’ she said, ‘I want to die.’”

Myth critics of the Frye persuasion will certainly find other versions in the tradition for this archetype, which lies somewhere between the legend of the Wandering Jew (with its literary embodiments all the way to Swift’s Struldbrugs, *Melmoth the Wanderer* and Simone de Beauvoir’s *Tous les hommes sont mortels*) and the notion of a *Götterdämmerung*-style collective euthanasia. We may, however, want to take a less belle-lettristic attitude towards the present variation on this theme. Remember that, before making ZARDOZ, Mr. Boorman lent

himself to a lavish production of that sermon in backwoods self-reliance which is James Dickey's *Deliverance*. It is a cautionary tale for a soft and citified U.S. bourgeoisie which therein is warned about the urgency of self-defense in a world not uniformly well disposed to suburbia. It is true that Mr. Boorman, possibly out of embarrassment, tried to correct the perspective of his text by making his heroes more distinctly antipathetic than they were in the novel. He also added the banjo session, in which a positive side of hillbilly culture was underscored, and a kind of compromise meeting ground between the two sides at least temporarily arranged. Still, *DELIVERANCE*'s moral suggests that this aspect of *ZARDOZ* needs a harder and more suspicious look than anything myth criticism is capable of. It also reminds us of our opening question, namely, what relation a movie's conceptual or ideological content ought to have to that more general sensory experience which it embodies and to the ultimate value we may want to assign it as a work of art.

We should begin by noting that the presence of History is not so strong in *ZARDOZ* as it is in science fiction of the "near future type (e.g., the 1984-type dystopia, *SOYLENT GREEN*). Boorman's film, indeed, seems to hesitate between a future history of a henceforth conventional kind—which dramatizes the human race's survival after the atomic cataclysm, the rebuilding of civilization, the survival of knowledge, or the return of mankind to the savagery of some dark ages. Or it may offer instead an atemporal fable of the appearance-reality variety, something on the order of, say, *THE MAGNUS*, which seems to have left its traces here in the (to me) tiresome puppet master/ magician, with his annoyingly self-conscious winks at the audience.

Yet History can nonetheless be felt in the splendid opening sequences—less in the implied distance between our own present and this projection of a distant future some three centuries hence than in the cross cutting from one landscape of this future world to another. For by the time of *Zardoz*, the human race is supposed to have evolved along in two separate and independent lines of development. On the one hand, there's the "outlands," with their feudal structure and their return to barbarism, their hooded horsemen and helpless population put to sword and flame. On the other, *ZARDOZ* opposes a vision of a post-technological Utopia, a commune of leisure and super-science whose inhabitants have chosen, for hygienic reasons, to perform their own manual tasks. These sequences are marked with a curiously pastoral, anachronistic character. We see future machinery erected within the rural peacefulness of the British countryside, historic abbeys outfitted with wonderworking equipment shrouded in transparent plastic, unpolluted Irish woods and ponds among which the immortals, in their Grecian vestments and ancient Egyptian headdresses, discreetly wander. This village enclave, indeed, provides us with some spectacular Godard-like solid colors and painted walls, recalling Stanley Cavell's idea ([1](#)) that color, in film, far from being an added instrument in conveying reality, is in fact a means of transmuting the given, a device of Utopian transfiguration.

These two modes of life are of unequal difficulty aesthetically. That of the reversion to barbarism is no doubt the easiest to convey, and the most powerful and suggestive. ZARDOZ's opening sequences recall that electrifying first glimpse of the masters of the PLANET OF THE APES on horseback, driving their servile population of former humans before them through the fields. Masks and horses: suddenly Marc Bloch's attribution to the latter of the entire feudal power structure (2) takes on a deeper and more fundamental symbolism. The images of horsemen on the strand, of hooves galloping through the foam on the edges of the sea itself, exercise a powerful atavistic fascination on the modern mind. It's as though they were sweeping a world free of the detritus of marinas and motels, of pleasure boats and gas stations, and returning us to a harsher nature in which man nonetheless—owing to his mount!—plays a more commanding and active role than is assigned him in what we call civilization.

The vision of our civilized order's collapse, indeed, touches a receptive chord in anyone's imagination. It awakens some of those same fantasies and anxieties which DELIVERANCE also set out to manipulate. This particular future-history convention, the disappearance of civilization after a historic catastrophe, the reversion to Neolithic life, or feudalism, or isolated food-gathering tribal units, is not necessarily the unalloyed nightmare it may at first seem. It relieves us, indeed, of the obligations of civilization as well, of the burden of repression inherent in the latter, of which Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* is the classic statement. The end of the world is also the end of this particular world of U.S. monopoly capitalism. As such, the possibility can be just as much a wish fulfillment as a source of alarm; in the event, I think, are both at once, in the unity of a single complex and ambivalent fantasy line.

Yet, even the negative aspect of this convention is perhaps more complicated than we may be tempted to think. Obviously, its first implication is a radically personal one, raising the fundamental question about our survival in such an altered universe. It causes us to wonder whether we ourselves would have had the know-how and the ruthlessness to adapt to more primitive conditions and demands. DELIVERANCE's original sin, from an ideological point of view, was to have tried to allay this anxiety and to have answered this question, to have provided a formula apt to satisfy the self questionings of the bourgeois public. In this sense DELIVERANCE was a cheap wish fulfillment with hidden political motive. It tried to suggest that people like us (read: the U.S. middle classes) can really be counted on, when the chips are down and in spite of our woeful physical preparation, to win out and smite our enemies. ZARDOZ, by transposing the entire issue into future history, eliminates at least this immediate local class reference. It apparently divests the fantasy of its ideological implications (although whether this can ever really be completely achieved we will try to determine later on).

ZARDOZ's strength, in this respect, lies in the ambiguity of its main character, who is both stronger and stupider than we are (a barbarian,

with barbaric ruthlessness and impulses) but also more intelligent and ultimately more resourceful and imaginative than his Utopian captors. He is not therefore a hero in the usual sense of a model for behavior, but rather something closer to a device for capturing and holding our fantasy investment. Sean Connery's heavy features have indeed rarely been so expressive in their basic inexpressiveness. Scowls, blank looks, a raised eyebrow or a sudden sharp light in the eye, the most economical gestures are here charged with density of meaning, with the accumulated reactions of a whole character structure. It is good to see this actor used to better effect than in the vacuity of the Bond movies, for whose sophisticated banter his facial equipment was far too ponderous (Roger Moore is much more suitable). Connery's gift is rather that of the physical orchestration of sarcasm, of contempt, of glacial indifference, of the type which, before this, he was given to manifest in Kalatazov's admirable RED TENT. There, Amundsen's arrogance and disdain finally met a worthy adversary in death itself. In the icy wreckage of the dirigible, among corpses as though immobilized for an instant at their various occupations, doomed, he calmly prepares himself for his fate, meditatively opening a stray volume in order to while away the final minutes of life.

What, indeed, is the star system good for, if not to offer so many diverse physical forms in which our various reactions find appropriate objectification? Projected outward and manifested in something a little more complex than what has been called empathy or identification, our own fleeting emotions and feelings find themselves endowed each with a complete individuality of its own. Our feelings are lent the stylistic homogeneity of, say, erotic humor, or defenselessness, or rage, or nerves—each insubstantial nuance of our own being-in-the-world made flesh and labeled with the name of an actor, contemplated with a complacency in which the very secret of the movies as a form lies buried. So here there is something touching about the use of Connery's muscular body, among the sexless androgynous creature creatures of the Vortex, as a very symbol of human frailty and mortality.

As for his adversaries among the Utopians, the men, at least, are surely meant to dramatize the opposite of the body itself, a kind of angelism of which the sex organs' atrophy is both symptom and symbol. The aesthetic problem here is that Boorman has judged his Utopia from the outset and condemned it to destruction. Thus he deprives the film of some more interesting and ambiguous tension between the demands of life and the consequences of perfection. In this hostility to the Utopian impulse, Boorman is of course not alone. On the contrary, it is characteristic of the entire West today, whose dominant convention in this realm is rather the dystopia, Utopia gone wrong like some nightmare of berserk machinery. In dystopia all the features of order are mustered to create the ultimate straitjacket for the human instincts, if not the human spirit. But we should take into consideration the possibility that this repugnance of our society for the Utopian vision may itself be an ideological symptom rather than a genuine historical and ontological recognition. Marcuse is, indeed, only the most recent to

have denounced the anti-utopian inclination of our society as a key feature in its repressive apparatus and structure. It seems to me axiomatic that the refusal of Utopia—whatever motivation is given (e.g., excessive rationalization, atrophy of the physical, planification and totalitarianism)—is always a code word or disguise for refusing *socialism*. The anti-utopian strategy has as its function to eliminate from the outset the possibility of any speculation about human possibilities and the transformation of the social order. It forestalls the kind of thinking which would explain the present society's imperfections and injustices as the result of history and human action, rather than as the reflection of some immutable and constitutionally defective human nature. Not that Boorman has anything original to add to this strategy, which begins to be elaborated with the Soviet revolution (*We, Brave New World*) and knows its climax in the U.S. apologists of the Cold War. But his film works within its conventions and thus serves, if nothing else, as to contribute to its reinforcement.

The classical representation of the opposition between barbarism and Utopia, or between degenerated versions of each, is however to be found in H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895), a work which, in its deliberate and cynical demystification of such 19th century idealistic Utopias as Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, may be said to represent something like the climax of 19th century speculation on the nature and future development of the industrial class system. In Wells, of course, the weak and pitiful Eloi have become the victims of the grim Morlocks, who live and work beneath the earth and emerge at night to prey on the descendents of their former rulers. In *ZARDOZ*, this process has not yet gone so far. Boorman's sexless "Eloi" are still able, through the use of religion and the establishment of a kind of mercenary army of the classical *Lumpenproletariat* type, to control otherwise dangerous "lower classes" and to use the latter's labor to establish for themselves an oasis of leisure and privilege.

But the inhabitants of Boorman's Vortex are a ruling class of a particular type. They are drawn principally from the scientific elite, whose discoveries and technological know-how have made this new Utopia possible. Thus another possible interpretation or decoding would read the film as a fable of the University itself, as the spectacle of a realm isolated from the surrounding culture, of intellectuals as unsuccessful candidates for some projected new race of supermen, and their ivory tower as the spoils of the barbarians who break in upon them to destroy it.

In this respect, *ZARDOZ* redramatizes another familiar theme of science fiction, which is worth pausing on for a moment, namely the hypostasis of the cultural tradition as such. Such a theme depicts the pathos of a new intellectual dark ages, and the burning of the books, the vision of a rebirth of civilization from the monastic manuscripts and the like. Indeed, books themselves have always played an important role in science fiction, but in a somewhat different way from that more familiar way in high culture where we so often find novels written about novels



and in general literature which signifies literature itself. I am not at all convinced that science fiction is really about science, nor even that scientific elements or ideology loom very large in it. (The example of Jules Verne would suggest, indeed, that technology and *engineering* are the more basic models, if models of this type are sought.) It is certain that the overvaluation of the Library as such is a reflex of the technological orientation. (It is part of the whole complex of values of idealistic liberalism, with its emphasis on reeducation and on education proper, and, to return to our opening theme, in general on enlightenment.) It is essential to preserve the books, not because, as in “high” literature, there is some privileged value seen in writing and inscription in general, but because books contain the secret of the machines. The manual gives the plan of Brian Aldiss’ *Starship* while the starship’s log tells the story of the disaster that resulted in a new dark ages for its passengers. More explicitly, the classics of “future history” all in one way or another sound this theme. The canonical treatment is surely Walter Miller’s *Canticle for Leibowitz*, in which a priestly caste of intellectuals preserves scientific documents and know-how against iconoclastic and book-burning barbarians. The latter theme is of course the very subject of Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*, while the Strugatsky Brothers’ *Hard to be a God* gives a picture the same archetypal “dark ages” from the standpoint of the tradition of Soviet science fiction. My own suspicion is that this henceforth conventionalized theme amounts to the worst kind of ideological vested interest on the part of intellectuals themselves, even of those who might otherwise feel a little shame at this self-serving status apologia, but who may well be willing to sacrifice such personal reluctance in the name of the survival of Culture itself. Much more palatable are those Utopias, from William Morris to Phil Dick, which are conceived in terms of handicraft and manual labor, the return to the rudiments of village production as a kind of implied rebuke to the passive consumption encouraged by commodity capitalism (elements also present in rudimentary form, as we have seen in ZARDOZ). Even though such visions are themselves anachronistic, insofar as they are ultimately inspired by an older archaic stage in the development of the economic system to which we can scarcely hope to return, their very ideologies redolent of the handicraft radicalism of tinkers and village shoemakers, the politics of Bunyan and Blake, let alone of the twenty-first or -second century. Yet the emphasis on labor rather than on knowledge amounts to a glorification of the Slave rather than the Master, of village industry rather than of that priestly caste whose monopoly on writing and books, as Lévi-Strauss suggests, was at the very origins of class society and of political domination.(3)

Still, I must admit that I like Boorman’s version of the ultimate library better than the sentimentalized ambulatory classics of Bradbury and Truffaut. There is something tantalizing, indeed, about these Arcimbaldo-like human forms marbled over by the very raw materials of culture itself, with equations and molecules, script and cartographic projects, torsos, busts, and whole statues convex with scientificity, plastic glimpses of flesh transmuted into the very codes of knowledge, succeeding themselves in a revolving pan shot against the black void of

the turning screen itself. (It is doubly amusing, then, that this supreme knowledge should come to the hero as the other end of an exchange of all he has to offer in return, namely emissions of fresh and healthy sperm cells.)

This is the moment, perhaps, to press our initial question a little more insistently. We should try to determine what connection there is, if any, between Boorman's "ideology"—if that is the right word for the conceptual content of *ZARDOZ*—and his purely filmic visual composition. The film, which has inevitably been compared to Kubrick's *2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY*, seems to me much closer in general narrative spirit to movies like Fellini's *SATYRICON*. (To reawaken a dead world is as "speculative" as the projection of a future one, it is an enterprise we might characterize—think of Golding's *Inheritors*—as archeological science fiction.)

The visual features of *2001* were, on the one hand, the screen as a surface to be inscribed, and on the other, the window-cockpit traveling across an expanse of landscapes. So its great events were moments like that in which the "life lines" of the sleeping crew members gradually flattened out into death's static linearity (here the screen functions as an instrument panel, or the registering apparatus of a seismograph or an EKG). Or that in which the computer HAL is dismantled, circuit by circuit (the visual sequence of lights being extinguished here reduplicated by the successive decomposition of the computer's voice as well). Or again, like the slow approach or rapid tumbling disappearance of the body of the dead astronaut in space, encased in the cocoon of his cumbersome space suit. Or the final dizzying flight over some hallucinogenic Arctic of colors beyond the normal range of human eyesight. *ZARDOZ* is no match for moments like these, in which we are spectators seated comfortably in the speeding vehicle of a movie theatre soaring into infinity. But to Kubrick's reaffirmation of the *flatness* of the visual screen, Boorman has his own distinctive effects to oppose, and notably the concept of the visual field as a plane or interface of some more complex and layered, chippable or fragmentable crystalline solid. (I would suppose that the ultimate symbol of the crystal emerges from Boorman's use of the camera, rather than the other way around.) So the visual pleasures of *ZARDOZ* are of a world explored with the rather complex registering instrument of crystalline refraction, or, occasionally, a world itself encased in crystal, and to be penetrated or at length, to be smashed. Connery pounds on the invisible force field which is also your movie screen, and he knows the ultimate and predictable, Wells-like bewilderment in the cinematographic house of mirrors. But there are also more curious projections of technique back into theme, or of what Jakobson would have called the axis of combination back into the axis of selection again(4). This is notably visible in the obsession with plastic bags and coverings, which are little other than the movie screen itself gone limp, sagging upon the struggling characters and impeding their movements, a kind of ultimate working through of Boorman's interest in planes and silhouettes, of solids viewed through semi-transparent partitions of veils or vegetation.

One is tempted, indeed, to see the whole plot in terms of a substitution of one kind of space for another. In this reading, the viewer is prepared for ZARDOZ's peculiar non-Euclidean geometry and spatial structure by the initial experience of the stone head itself. Detached against the void from all perspective or worldness, it's a free-floating image, then organizes the rest of the ordinary physical world rid around itself as a kind of Gestalt-like "background." Here normal innerworldly perspective is then bracketed by something like a kind of meta-space or meta-perspective. We are forced to move inside the head itself, inside of some new and unaccustomed enveloping solid, in order to glimpse our world again in the ordinary way, in a Kubrick-like panoramic flight. This initial visual experience would then provide the motivation for the rest of the film's development. In terms of the content, it expresses the terror of the open plain, of that defenseless exposure of the remnants of humanity to their marauding persecutors. The other end of the film, the terminus of what might be called this purely spatial plot, is the cave's clean but contained space, in which the screen once more recovers its character, as a space on which to be inscribed. Here the succession of slides give us the family sequence through time to death and a kind of skeletal *trompe-l'oeil* composition, with the hanging gun and the fossil traces of an ancient human past. The Vortex, then, comes to be seen as the bewildering and mediatory element through which we must pass to arrive at this concluding image, in which, through space, something like the real time of human existence is once more reinvented.

So, at length, we reach ZARDOZ's ideological center with its strident advocacy of the right to die. I have to confess that the orgy of violence with which this idea celebrates its triumph does not offend me very much. Here again, we find a paradoxical demonstration of the difference between narrative logic and that of ordinary innerworldly content. In terms of the plot and for the inhabitants of the Vortex, death is a good thing. This final slaughter sets off overtones of a happy ending which are most peculiar, given the context.

Nor is it even certain that Boorman's thesis here is necessarily a rightwing theory of the Ardrey type. I see at least one way of reading ZARDOZ which would have quite a different emphasis and make of it a powerful commentary on the structural propensity of the affluent society to generate death and radiate violence in the world surrounding it. In a reading like this, we Americans are ourselves the Vortex's immortals, freed by the service economy from the drudgery of real labor and sheltered cosmetically from any real experience of death. Yet our world's leisure and privileges are dependent on the effectiveness with which, through the violence of our mercenaries and the power of superstition and enforced ignorance, we are able to extract the necessary riches from servile and miserable populations abroad. At length, even to ourselves, capitalism comes to seem a criminal attempt to tamper with the laws of nature (e.g., in terms of the film, to live forever). The ultimate reckoning at the hands of the barbarians (read: Armageddon, the final destruction of the Fortress Amerika) is by way of rejoining the rest of the human race in their finite (e.g., mortal) but more authentic

existence.

Of course, the force as well as the ambiguity of the openness of this type of form (essentially a kind of fable) is that there is nothing in the movie to dictate such an interpretation to its public. There's nothing in the structure of the form to preempt alternative readings or to ensure that the ideologically correct conclusions will really be drawn in the long run. And there is nothing whatsoever to prevent the viewers from falling back on the opposite thesis and concluding that Boorman has once again convinced us of the existence of some impulse to hunt and kill at the very center of human life. So it is ultimately up to personal impression whether the anti-Utopian thesis described above is not, at length, the principal message we take away from the film. It has an appeal to ethical cliché (to build a Utopia is a sin of *pride*), to anti-intellectualism (even scientists end up making disastrous mistakes), to machismo (you'll lose your balls), and to political terror (an experiment of this kind always turns into a dictatorship of some elite). But perhaps the assessment of the movie's dominant theme is less significant, ideologically, than the very fact of the open form itself, which suggests an aesthetic strategy not unlike that of liberal pluralism and "repressive tolerance" in the political realm.

The apologists of the French *nouvelle vague* have frequently suggested that, in spite of the legends which developed around the great silent movie directors in the first regressive period after the introduction of sound, it is only in the last fifteen years that film's full resources have been available and exploited, for the first time, in the artistic realization of distinctive personal statements as rich as those of modern poetry or the modern novel. And it is certain that the variety and formal virtuosity of the work of directors like Bergman and Fellini is quite unprecedented and seems to mark a new departure. *ZARDOZ* is clearly a film of this type, which, in budgetary outlay and in technical know-how and ingenuity of effects, one cannot imagine having been made at any earlier period.

Yet with this new freedom and range of expressive means ought to go something which one is forced to call artistic responsibility. It is not the idea of using film as a medium for subjective and lyrical visions that I object to so much. That is both Fellini's strength and self-indulgence. And there is no reason why movies should be deprived of the same rights as literary language. But Boorman's vision is not really personal enough to qualify for Fellini-type self-expression. While the vacuity of recent productions such as Jodorowski's *HOLY MOUNTAIN*—very much in Fellini's tradition for their dazzling imagery—make you begin to wonder whether the subjective and self-expressive period of modern moviemaking is not at an end. I wonder whether we have not reached, in movies, something like the post-modernism of contemporary U.S. poetry, which is no longer interested in subjective richness or in the individual ego and its wealth of fantasy and style. Boorman's movies are at any rate post-subjective in this sense. His equivalent for the older types of subjectivity is, as I have suggested above, the fable. And it is the

fable as a form which accounts for the plurality of meanings we have thought we could detect in ZARDOZ. Science fiction or metaphysical fable: this hesitation we are now in a better position to evaluate. I would think myself that an outright commitment to science fiction would have forced Boorman into an honesty and a speculation about future history which his other aesthetic all too cheaply and easily allows him to elude. Is the fable about to become our generation's formal cop-out, and fulfill the function of those tiresome Faulknerian myths and Jamesian ironies with which our fathers attempted, after their fashion, to avoid the unpleasant realities of politics and history itself? I hope not. At least there is enough of an aesthetic corrective in ZARDOZ to give it vitality. May the viewer only make no mistake about it, and attribute to the fable the energy and the content which belonged in reality to the science fiction framework.

## Notes

1. See his chapter on color in *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (New York, 1971 pp. 80-101.
2. See his *Feudal Society* (Chicago, 1968), p. 152.
3. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques* (New York, 1970), ch. 25, "A Writing Lesson."
4. See his definition of poetry in Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge, 1960), p. 358

### Chinatown

### “Do as little as possible”

### Polanski's Message and Manipulation

by Murray Sperber

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In psychoanalytic theory, films are supposed to touch our unconscious and connect to our deepest fears and hopes. That so few do is probably less because of the inadequacies of Freud's theories than the incompetence of most filmmakers. Most of the time we just cannot believe what's happening up there on the screen, so we can hardly be moved by it.

CHINATOWN disturbs us. It penetrates many psychic defenses, surrounds us, and in a sense, places our heads under its bell jar. From the opening sequence—a series of semi-pornographic pictures of a couple screwing in the woods—it arouses our curiosity and totally involves us. We are like children trying to figure out what these adults are doing sexually, what is happening in this primal scene, what are these huge figures up to? We are confused—the photos turn quickly, the couple are clothed but are screwing—and even a little frightened. We are also informed, on almost a subliminal level, of Polanski's political point. The last picture is of the woman being penetrated from the rear—a sexist image Polanski uses to say: in this world, everyone takes it in the ass.

Polanski's plot in CHINATOWN, on its surface, is about political corruption, a Water Department (Watergate?) scandal in Los Angeles in the 1930s. But his real story concerns human corruption, so deep and extensive as to be terminal. And his message, for all its apparent topicality, is finally so pessimistic, really nihilistic, that although Polanski exposes the corruption of capitalism (the sexual as well as the financial), he does not offer even the wisp of a political alternative. Everything turns to blood (or water or money) in this world. Polanski's talent is such that for the length of the film he can almost convince us of his vision. He can tap some very deep fears and pessimism in our psyches. Thus he turns Chinatown—the place as well as the idea—into a symbol of human corruption, chaos, and immorality unimaginable to most straight Westerners. It is possibly even a symbol of early sexual

mysteries, primal scenes, about which, he suggests, it is best not to inquire.

Polanski totally controls the film. He is a master craftsman, meticulous and inventive, so careful and so in control that you have to admire his work as you would the product of a great Baroque jewelry maker. We see his control in the following touches:

- the 1930s titles
- the intricacies of the names (J.J. Gittes: will he get it? Noah Cross: no one crosses him, etc.)
- the references to other films (MALTESE-FALCON-like shadows on the detective's glass door, etc.)
- the photographic composition (the titles framed in black, most shots framed in black—even when it means looking through binoculars or rearview mirrors or front windshields—an entire world framed in black)
- the photographic color (suffused, golden browns or navy blues: almost every shot is filmed in the late afternoon, early morning, or night—the white heat haze of Los Angeles is turned into an autumnal death-bed darkness)
- and even the music (late 1930's deep, tenor sax; Bunny Berrigan's "I Can't Get Started with You," a longing there's always a party out there, somewhere else).

His pacing is slow, at times languid, almost boring. Polanski tries to convince us that so was life at this time, at all times. Even his violence is subdued—a mutilation of the hero (done by Polanski himself, in a white suit), a few punch-ups, and a bloody ending. Nothing to compare to the overt violence of ROSEMARY'S BABY or MACBETH. But it's as if he were trying to take violence to a lower stratum of the psyche and permanently plant it there. Polanski does not attempt to thrill or even terrify us by CHINATOWN's violence. Rather, he attempts to get us to accept its permanence. As an actor, Polanski appears a second time. He is coming up the driveway of the Mar-Vista rest home when Gittes escapes. He is the man that the thug, Mulvahill, refers to when he says, "Someone wants to see you." He is in charge of violence for Noah Cross. He is both physically and psychically in control of the violence in CHINATOWN.

Polanski is less visible in his manipulation of the plot and of the viewer. When Gittes in the opening scene is tricked by the phony Mrs. Mulwray, so are we. Throughout the film, when we think Gittes is really on to something and we find out that he has been tricked, so have we. He sees the pictures of Mulwray and Cross arguing outside The Pig and Whistle. (Cross is a pig, Mulwray was about to blow the whistle? But it was also a real restaurant chain.) Gittes scorns the pictures, says they're useless and tells his assistant, "This business requires some finesse."

And, of course, the photos are a key to the entire plot. We sort of know that and when we see the picture of Cross on the Water Department wall, we make the connection before Gittes does. But in the end, we're

not very much ahead of him and we are as manipulated by Polanski as Gittes is by Noah Cross.

Polanski gets us to identify with J.J. Gittes. He makes the detective a recognizable type: the lone gun, wise guy, private detective. Polanski also gives Gittes a streak of romanticism (that girl Gittes hurt long ago in Chinatown). Gittes is shrewd, corrupt (except he draws the line at extortion), crazy and convincing. (Jack Nicholson plays him perfectly: Nicholson's on the screen almost constantly and his very lack of emotional range—which makes him so tedious in other films—works well here.)

Polanski also wants us to identify with Gittes' bravado and basic confusion. We quickly realize that Gittes has been fucked over so many times that he's only looking for a little edge, just enough to keep going and stay a little ahead. Even his rage is somehow muted, tired. He fills his life with small-time tricks (the watches under the wheel; the Assistant Water Commissioner's business cards; the page torn out of the deed file in the Hall of Records; etc.). We cheer as he triumphs over officious clerks and dumb cops. But he can never get far enough ahead to figure out what is going on, to get on top of it. Nor, once inside Polanski's plot, can we. Gittes is the petty-bourgeois. He's always telling his secretary to "draw up the papers." But just as she is gum-chewing and bubble-headed (versus the Water Department's efficient man-woman), Gittes is only competent within his small-time world, or as he says, "matrimonial work." Finally he is no more able to understand the upper classes, the people like the Crosses who control things, than, Polanski implies, are we.

Polanski presents Gittes with Evelyn Mulwray. She is a Cross, and just as she confuses Gittes, she perplexes us. Faye Dunaway, in the part, is authentically looney. According to Polanski, in a recent interview in *Rolling Stone* (July 18, 1974) crazy off-screen as Faye Dunaway is, she also is mad as Gittes' erotic dream and the murdered Water Commissioner's wife. (The Commissioner, the one honest and apparently good man in this entire world, is thin, ugly, wears thick glasses and is soon killed: he's too much a cartoon. Polanski takes the easy way out with this character, as he does with other political figures: the fat, cigar-chomping and corrupt Coroner, listening to his racing results and not asking questions; and Police Lieutenant Escobar, confused, worried, promoted by a system that knows he won't inquire too deeply.)

Polanski has Gittes tell Evelyn Mulwray that he's pursuing the case because "I'm not supposed to be the one caught with his pants down." This connects to the opening photos of the man whom Gittes caught with his pants down and the later affair with Evelyn and the bewilderment throughout. Also Gittes' petty-bourgeois sense of himself has been challenged (just as it was in the barber shop by the banker's jibe). Gittes is so intent on not losing his status as a private detective (later, he's afraid of losing his license), that he can never really figure



out what's happening. He tells Evelyn that her husband's girl friend "was pretty in a cheap sort of way." He could not be more wrong. She wasn't the husband's girl friend and she hardly appears cheap. She is always in expensive white clothes and she is young and virginal.

Evelyn pronounces his name as "giddies" and she makes him light-headed. She reveals a small confidence—that she has had lots of affairs—and he takes it as a major confession. She is playing for much higher stakes than he (or we) can imagine. Even when she finally tells him the truth, he's uncomprehending, unable to fully understand such a thing. ("He raped you?" he asks. "No," she shakes her head.)

Polanski presents their romance as tired, doomed, and not very romantic. But most of all, Polanski tries to confuse us. When they kiss for the first time, he circles the camera around as Hitchcock did in the most sexual of all 1940s kisses—Cary Grant and Ingrid Bergman in *NOTORIOUS*—but we are most aware of Gittes' scabby nose. In bed, Evelyn is made to look very oriental, especially her eyes and yellow skin color (Chinatown?), and her feelings are only revealed later, and then flash by. After Gittes follows her to her daughter-sister's house and confronts her outside, she asks, as he starts to get out of the car, "Aren't you coming back with me me?" "Don't worry, Mrs. Mulwray," he says with full crassness, "I won't tell anyone." She answers, and seems hurt, "That's not what I meant." But he does leave. In that moment her look says: Men are pigs after all. She has finally started to reveal herself, and Gittes can only fall back into his small-time trap.

Controlling all events in the movie is Noah Cross. When first encountered, Cross seems mainly a rich old crank. Over lunch with Gittes we have little sense of his venality and total power. He's Evelyn Mulwray's father, he's the man who owns Los Angeles, he's also John Huston. (This is truly a star movie: from its opening Hollywood studio titles to its use of Nicholson, Dunaway and especially Huston. Because John Huston is an authentically great man, it helps us believe that he is more than a character actor playing a man who supposedly owns L.A.. Cross/Huston really might own L.A..) Cross also looks a little like President Roosevelt, and Polanski fills the movie with portraits of FDR (who in public, was kindly and straight but, in fact, was aristocratic, manipulative, and rather careless about bourgeois sexual standards).

Cross is found at the Albacore Yacht Club (Gittes' assistant thought that he had heard Cross and Mulwray arguing about "Applecore"). Cross is a biblical patriarch, a kind of first man, and he makes it with Evelyn-Eve (git-it?). He pronounces Gittes' name, "Gits," and his contempt for and manipulation of the detective is total. Cross owned the Water Department, he put holes in Hollis Mulwray (we actually see them in the corpse), and he is hardly satisfied with ten million dollars, he wants to own the future. He also can stop a speeding bullet—Evelyn fires at him point blank and there is no blood, only a stiff arm. In the end, he gets exactly what he wants, and because he owns the police, he is invulnerable. He is the true Lord of the Earth, a man tempted to do what

other men, like Gittes, can hardly imagine. Polanski both admires him and seems pleased to be his hatchet man.

Polanski is a true cynic. He enjoys manipulating people—thus Cross might be the real hero of CHINATOWN. In the climactic scene of the movie, where we identify with Gittes and his attempt to help Evelyn escape to Mexico, Polanski has Gittes confront Cross with the incriminating glasses. Gittes actually thinks—and we hope—that Cross will somehow crumble. But Gittes is disarmed like a child. Polanski's point is that we should accept Cross's mastery as total and inevitable. Thus we should accept the pessimism of the film's conclusion as equally inevitable.

Gittes has been had, we've been had, and Polanski can retire behind his work of art, smiling at the folks out there, assuming that he has gotten us to accept his vision of corruption and nihilism.

Polanski is like a great Baroque artisan, coming at the end of an artistic tradition—the Hollywood movie. He is content to carve a final, overwrought product out of it (and possibly, he establishes his film character's obeisance to Noah Cross as a parallel to his directorial relationship to John Huston). This is a highly Baroque film. Those viewers who like to get inside Baroque puzzles will enjoy it most: Did you notice the counterpoint between the aristocratic Spanish architecture of the Mulwrays' and Cross' mansions and the imitation hacienda style of the petty-bourgeois homes? But California Spanish architecture is Baroque to begin with. Did you see the overheated car through the window of the barber shop? Did you notice the 30s hats shading eyes, making people blind and sinister? Did you hear Gittes' assistant phone up and say, "Duffy here," like in the old radio show, "Duffy's Tavern"? Did you notice ...? Enough, the game is endless, trivia overwhelms content and meaning.

Baroque art is also decadent art: the end of a tradition. CHINATOWN is a decadent movie, both in its artifice and its meaning. Those people who see the world as decay and shit will get inside CHINATOWN and enjoy it most (the *Rolling Stone* interviewer gives you a whiff of this). Those people who enjoy being led up mysterious alleys and fed false clues (what possible meaning can the Mexican boy on the horse have?) will get inside CHINATOWN and ignore or approve its basic cynicism and audience-manipulation. And those people who see the world as inevitably corrupt and controlled by alien and dark forces will chant the movie's final line like a mantra, "Forget it, Jake, it's Chinatown." But Baroque art, because of its very intricacy, finally excludes all but the artist. Thus if you ever meet a CHINATOWN freak, you are probably confronting an aspiring elitist, and a Roman Polanski *manqué* (missed, failed, lacking).

Polanski and Robert Evans (not coincidentally, the producer of THE GODFATHER, possibly the key film of the declining United States), are among the masters of the Hollywood Baroque. Polanski, particularly, makes such competitors as Altman and Hill look very thin indeed

(compare the density and control of CHINATOWN to the superficiality and wandering about of THE LONG GOODBYE). Polanski, a despicable egomaniac (read his interviews) can touch a psychic stratum, can break through rational optimism, can show that our deepest fears really exist and cannot be banished as easily as we might have thought.

“Do as little as possible,” Gittes says at the very end to Escobar, but also as a final truth to himself, part in anger and sarcasm. Apparently, that’s Polanski’s recipe for declining United States. Lean back and don’t fight it, enjoy its decadent art (and be sure to bring \$3.00 for a ticket to CHINATOWN). Forget about beating the system, however, because it’s controlled by the Noah Crosses of this world, with the Polanskis as their hatchet men.

There is a pessimism, a darkness in everyone that might be tempted—however briefly—by this formula. But can anyone really consider it a worldview, a life script? Bullshit. And anyway, how would we get the \$3.00 to make Robert Evans and Polanski rich if we did “as little as possible.”

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[To top](#)   [Current issue](#)   [Archived essays](#)   [Jump Cut home](#)

# JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

*Marlowe. The Long Goodbye*

Phillip Marlowe

hardboiled to softboiled to poached

by William Van Wert

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Whatever happened to the “hardboiled” hero, the detective who sat in the dark with his mud-splattered shoes propped up on his desk or who took long walks with his hands in the pockets of a not-so-white trenchcoat with the collar turned up to his ears and the brim of his hat folded down over the eyes? Remember how it was always raining? Remember how everything looked like Chicago, no matter where it actually took place? (Our hero wouldn't be caught dead in New England or the Old South!) Remember how bald Bogie or George Raft looked when they took off their hats (castration?)? And how they chain-smoked, how they could get out three one-word sentences in one exhaled smoke ring, how the unfiltered Camel or Lucky Strike used to dangle from the corner of the tight and scabby lips, just as loose and cool as the pearled pistols used to dangle from Randolph Scott's holsters? Remember how the light used to get to their eyes when they'd come back indoors, so that they'd either squint or else stare bleary-eyed like insomniacs? And how about the hack coughing, as often for dramatic effect as for any real phlegm they harbored in their holstered smoke-stack throats? Remember how they used to spit out the one syllable epithets at both cops and crooks with such practiced savvy? And how polite and prepubescently uptight they were with the women who looked like ex-prom queens but who, more often than not, turned out to be the ones *whodunit*?

You knew the art collectors were crooks and their henchmen were high school dropouts. You never suspected anybody of being really sexual. You were never bothered by Bogie's poor nutrition or George's lack of sleep, because they never got sick to their stomachs and they never yawned. You overtly admired these men of nails (while you secretly wanted to talk and walk like Peter Lorre). Those were the good old days, when a Spade was a spade. Nowadays Woody Allen wears a trenchcoat, and TV has thrown kinks into the hard-boiled detectives, who are now

fat (*Cannon*) old (*Barnaby Jones* or otherwise ethnically Polarized (*Banacek*, *Kojac*). One of these days Kurt Vonnegut Jr. is going to write the ultimate American novel about how *Bartleby the Scrivener* was really a super sleuth in disguise.

Such generalizations about the hardboiled hero were possible with 30s detective films, but only in the 40s with the blossoming of a style called film noir did such generalizations become expectations in the minds of the mass audience. Film noir encompasses many things. Economically, it implies low-budget filming, which means a tight plot situation with an emphasis on action or atmosphere over dialogue, and with few or no name actors. The “grit” associated with film noir stems from both a visual philosophy and a thematic one. Such films looked low-key in terms of lighting; fewer lights were used in such films than in the traditional Hollywood studio films. Thus, film noir often means black-and-white film, in which the blacks are blacker than usual and the whites seem whiter than usual. The high-contrast lighting also gave such films their “gritty” look. Thematically speaking, such films were also “gritty” because they inevitably dealt with the social problems inherent in a big city capitalist setting.

Thus, the detective-protagonist set himself apart by the mere fact that he was almost never of the same social class as his client. Sometimes he worked for the very rich. More often, he worked for the destitute and down-and-out, the very dregs of society. So, money is always a big issue in such films, but it is always *other people's money*. The detective's fee, for example, is never very problematic. Often, he works for free. In other words, it's not the fee but his sense of right and wrong or of duty and revenge that motivates the hardboiled detective. In sum, he is necessarily apart socially from other characters in the film. The perfect hardboiled detective is one who has upper-middle-class values and lower-middle-class (or even lower-class) manners.

All noir films present social controversy. They are exposure films, exposure to a to a seedier side of urban life than most of us are accustomed to: murder, narcotics, prostitution, prison, etc.. Thus, they are politically progressive, in that they expose society's social diseases. But they are also conservative, because, while the hardboiled detective is often sympathetic to those outside the law, he nevertheless remains just on the inside edge of that law himself. His surly-sour manner thinly masks a romantic idealism inside. The hardboiled hero believes in love, honesty, free enterprise and fair play, even though he obviously knows better. Still he remains old-fashioned. He is steadfastly a *self-made man*. He may resort to some playacting or even to very basic disguises. But he never resorts to technology, that is, to the fast cars, trick weapons and other slick gadgetry associated with the James Bond type of detective. The hard-boiled detective remains, for the most part, excruciatingly blunt. He wears his soul upon his chest, as the German Expressionists would say. He is “bad breath and bare fists.”

It's not difficult to see, then, that the visual and the thematic interlock in

the traditional film noir. Actors are “typed” by their faces, their dress, their speech, even by their visual environment. Thus, you could gauge what the men were like the very first time you saw them on the screen. It was often more difficult with the women (perhaps on purpose, because the women often gave the films their unusual twist-endings by turning out to be the agents of betrayal).

The genre has evolved. It's no longer possible to read the more recent detective films in such a predictable way. In fact, directors now use the type of traditional film noir to ironic advantage. Two recent Raymond Chandler adaptations will bear me out.

In the case of Paul Bogart's MARLOWE (1969, scripted by Stirling Silliphant), we have an example of the softboiled detective hero. The traditional film noir's directness between film and film audience in the is gone here, because James Garner as Phillip Marlowe constantly interrupts the action verbally. He steps between us and the film, giving us his interpretation of what is going on. In other words, we are never allowed to interpret the visuals independently of Garner-Marlow's wry commentaries.

What keeps this Marlowe in the detective business is his gallows humor, his ability to play out the most sordid tragedies with an ironic quip. Garner as Marlowe embodies everything that Humphrey Bogart embodied in earlier detective roles. The chief difference is in the degree of updating. Garner's Marlowe is much more verbally cynical than Bogart, much more flippant in the face of disillusionment or disaster, much less overtly sentimental than the Bogart persona. We know that inside Garner's Marlowe is the expected hopeless romantic, who mistakenly lives in the gutter of twentieth century cities. We know he stays on the case, because he is an idealist and because he believes in his client's innocence, not in the money he receives. Were we to analyze his actions alone in light of his environment, we would have to conclude that he is a fool.

But with the irony of his language, we can only conclude that he is a very intelligent fool, however much he destroys our image of the super sleuth by blundering into transparent traps, by allowing other characters to commit themselves rather than initiating action himself and inducing behavior from other characters. Garner's Marlowe's principal virtue is his off-beat wit. Thus the key to understanding MARLOWE is no longer in the visuals, as it would have been in the 40's, but rather in the dialogue. Garner's Marlowe is quicker and more cutting with his tongue than Bogart's Sam Spade was in THE MALTESE FALCON, for example, because his environment is much more sordid than was Sam Spade's. If THE MALTESE FALCON could be considered a morality play, then MARLOWE is an immorality play.

Garner's Marlowe, thus, is softboiled in his verbal cuteness. His responses are always ironic comments on the codified (that is, expected) language and behavior of the traditional detective. He gives his calling card to Grant Hicks, a blackmailer and professional thief. The following

dialogue ensues:

Marlowe: Thanks.

Hicks: Huh?

Marlowe: For not spitting on it.

When Marlowe leaves the apartment of his eventual client, film actress Mavis Wald (Gayle Hunnicutt), he is confronted by the hoods of Mavis's gangster boyfriend, Sonny Steelgrade. One hood says to Marlowe: Car! Marlowe retorts: Beep, beep! As the hoods rip Marlowe's suit off, Marlowe asks one of them: "Does your mother know what you do for a living?" They beat him in answer and leave him. It is because these hoods are so typed and predictable that Marlowe's comments seem so ironic and so funny.

Later, Steelgrade sends Winslow Wong (Bruce Lee) to Marlowe's office. Winslow is a karate expert, sent by Steelgrade to offer Marlowe \$500 to leave the case and to destroy Marlowe's office if the detective refuses. Marlowe watches Winslow put holes in the wall and says:

Marlowe: And who are you?

Winslow: Winslow Wong. That is I.

Marlowe: I like a man with good grammar. Now, whom sent you?

Thus, each confrontation becomes more and more violent, more and more sordid. Garner-Marlowe never loses his composure. His lines become more and more cutting, more and more ironic to meet the situation. He is not the most moral of characters, but his wit keeps him from being infected by the immorality of other characters. Significantly, when he is confronted with coyness, he responds with sarcasm, as is clear in the following exchange between Marlowe and Dolores Gonzales (Rita Moreno), a burlesque dancer:

Marlowe: You seen Mavis?

Dolores: Why should I turn you over to her?

Marlowe: Because behind those pasties there's a size forty heart.

Conversely, when he is confronted with a real compliment, of which there are very few in the film, he responds with evasive coyness:

Mavis: You know, Marlowe, you're rather nice for what you are.

Marlowe: Well, it could be the brandy or the altitude or a case of shock.

Again, I stress language over visuals. Visually speaking, the images reflect the whole tradition of film noir: the grittiness of Marlowe's office, the cheap glamour of Mavis' apartment or Steelgrade's mansion, the seedy decadence of the El Dorado Hotel and the smoky theater where Dolores does her burlesque act. It's in dialogue that characters

momentarily step out of this film noir ambiance. At some point or other in the film, all characters, with the exception of Marlowe's girlfriend, reveal through language their inherent anguish or evil. It's as if, while staying totally in character within the linear progression of the plot, they face the audience and deliver a monologue, a declarative speech in which they bare their smutty souls. They may seem to be speaking to other characters in the film, but in reality they are speaking to the audience. These brief moments of confession are what stick in the viewer's mind.

One such revelation involves the police. After destroying the evidence that links Mavis to the murder of Steelgrade, Marlowe is given the shakedown by Lt. Christy French (Caroll O'Connor) and his partner, Fred. French knows what Marlowe has done and is completely frustrated, because he can't prove it. He loses his temper and delivers his monologue on how bad it is to be a cop. The poignancy of his speech is reinforced by the visuals that follow. French goes to hit Marlowe with his fist. Fred steps between them and he gets the blow instead. Fred gets up rubbing his chin and comments:

"It's a new type of third degree. The police beat the hell out of each other and the suspect cracks up and confesses from the agony of watching."

Marlowe's own revelation is one of the most beautiful scenes in the film. In the darkness of his barren office, he lets Dolores massage his back while he verbally shatters the romantic image of the private eye.

Dolores: How was your day?

Marlowe: Average day in the life of a detective ... I've been stabbed, snubbed and generally snookered ... I ache all over ... My office qualifies for urban renewal ... The police envy my success. They're trying to take my license away ... I'd say that's an average day.

The question in the mind of the film viewer after such revelations is: if that's true, then why be a detective? Or, if that's true, then why be a policeman? This particular scene is the one scene in which the question is actually asked *within* the film and ironically by Dolores, who turns out eventually to be the murderer.

Dolores: I think Mavis is in trouble, Phillip.

Marlowe: All of my clients generally are. That's why they come to me.

Dolores: Why do you bother?

Marlowe: Stock options ... pension plan ...

Marlowe's easy cynicism and gallows humor are the only valid answers possible in this film noir. They are reinforced by the fact that, through the revelations, we see that no one is what he or she appears to be. Orin Quest turns out to be a blackmailer and a murderer. Hicks turns out to be Mileaway, a common hood. Doctor Iagardie turns out to be the



creator of the ice-pick murder method and the husband of Dolores. The women when undisguised are even more interesting. Orfamay Quest turns out to be disloyal to both Orin, her brother, and to Mavis, her sister. Mavis, suspicious from the start, turns out to be a victim, an innocent victim. And Dolores, sympathetic from the start, turns out to be Steelgrade's former lover and also his murderer. At the same time that characters are never what they seem to be, they still remain the types you expected them to be, only more so.

It's with this knowledge and under these conditions that at the film's conclusion Marlowe goes after Dolores. Her revelation is all the more effective, because of the earlier scene in which she had listened to Marlowe's confession, in which she had become, thus, in a certain sense the "conscience" of the audience. Her language is reinforced by the fact that the visuals are of her doing her striptease, On stage in the crude spotlight and the fog of cigarette smoke, she confesses to Marlowe while going through her bumps and grinds.

Dolores: Like I said, Mavis is a nice girl but why should she get all the goodies? And there's nothing you can do about it without getting Mavis into it ... And you wouldn't do that, would you?

Dolores points to the fact that Marlowe is compromised, caught in a moral dilemma that the Sam Spades never had to face. If evil is all-pervasive in the dirty city, then good can never conquer evil. Marlowe is caught, as, realistically speaking, all detectives are caught in one irony or another. In order to expose Dolores (justice), he would have to expose and ruin Mavis (injustice). The film's ultimate message of the film is that the forces of good cannot combat the forces of evil without somehow becoming contaminated by evil. Even when the jealous Doctor Iagardie saves Marlowe from an impossible situation by shooting Dolores and then shooting himself, the detective's dilemma remains. Marlowe is a tragic antihero, because, in spite of the odds, he never quits trying. As Marlowe walks out of the burlesque hail and into the impersonal, dimly-lit big city, we realize that there is poetic justice even in perversion. All of the murderers in the film are eventually murdered by other murderers, and the last murderer murders himself. All of this occurs out of court, away from the police, in the twisted context of *lawlessness-and-order*, the lawlessness ultimately bringing about the order. Evil is everywhere. But eventually all evils momentarily cancel out, giving the false appearance that good has triumphed.

If Paul Bogart's MARLOWE is an immorality play, then Robert Altman's THE LONG GOODBYE (1972-73, screenplay by Leigh Brackett) is an amorality play, a satirical spoof of the genre, in which narrative counts for very little and style reigns supreme. Eliot Gould as Marlowe is a poached hero, which is to say that he is none at all. Altman seems to take advantage of Gould's atrocious acting, stressing it at every turn. Gould's Marlowe is the exact opposite of Garner's Marlowe. Garner's Marlowe keeps his cool, Gould's constantly loses his. Garner-Marlowe's

wit is winning, because we know that he is always above the situation and apart from it. Gould-Marlowe's wit always reinforces his childishness in relation to the other characters in the film. His wit reveals his ignorance, his buffoonery. Where Garner-Marlowe is always the "first one to know," Gould-Marlowe is always the "last one to know." THE LONG GOODBYE is, in fact, the tale of Marlowe as chump.

The humor in Altman's film may perhaps seduce the viewer on the surface, but it doesn't hold its power. It fades quickly, because it is as gratuitous (coming from a *klutz*, or poached hero, like Gould) as the sex and violence of the film. Where Garner-Marlowe uses humorous repartees only in answer to serious questions posed by other characters (he is the only "cute" character in the film), Gould-Marlowe often loses his temper (too self-righteously) when confronted by others, reserving his most "humorous" (a synonym for "gross" here) quips for when he is with his cat, when he is alone, or when he is walking away from other characters. He is a mumbling, pouting, sulking Marlowe, a Marlowe whose humor is often unsolicited and thus is often uncalled for. And he is but one (and perhaps the least) among many "cute" characters: his cellmate, Roger, Sgt. Greene, the black man from the supermarket, etc.. His humor fails, for curses replace wit. It fails, finally, for it does not reveal character in the way Garner-Marlowe's lines do. The opening sequence with the cat, although episodic, is important, because it provides some structure and psychological insight into the characters. Our sympathy goes out to the cat. Once that is accomplished, Altman exploits our sympathy structurally. If cats are good, then dogs are bad, symbols of evil. The door to Roger (Sterling Hayden) and Eileen Wade's (Nina Van Pallandt) house in Malibu Colony has a sign which reads "Beware of Dog." For the audience, that should read: Beware of the characters who live inside. The dog, named Toro (a suggestion of Mexico?), predictably doesn't like Marlowe. When Marlowe first goes to Mexico in search of the missing Terry Lennox (Jim Bouton), a seemingly gratuitous visual contains two dogs copulating, a metaphor for both the coroner-policeman complicity and the Terry-Eileen relationship.

The cat sequence also establishes sexuality patterns in the film, and all sexuality patterns are in some way or another deviant, perverse, off-color, or so Altman seems to be telling us. The cat is Marlowe's sexuality. He is impervious to the nudity of his neighbors, equally oblivious to the come-on of Eileen Wade. Marlowe only jumps for his cat, Where Garner-Marlowe had a girlfriend and where his code statement to everyone was, "Because I'm a good detective," Gould-Marlowe's code statement to all the women in the film is "It's okay with me." When Marlowe here goes to the supermarket to get the Coury brand cat food, the exchange he has with the black who works there is also indicative of his sexuality.

Black: All this shit's the same.

Marlowe: You don't have a cat.

Black: What I need a cat for? I got a girl.

Marlowe, himself, reinforces the cat-woman equation when Lennox comes to his apartment with scratches on his face. Marlowe says: "Hey, Terry, I was just feeding my cat. You oughta be feeding your cat more." Later, as Marlowe is being let out of jail, the black from the supermarket is being put in. The black says: "How's your cat?" Marlowe answers: "How's your girl?"

The inference is clear. Marlowe's cat is his girl, but his cat did not get him thrown in jail, as happened to the other fellow. There is no further reference to the cat until the last sequence of the film.

Marlowe: So you used me.

Lennox: That's what friends are for. Nobody cares.

Marlowe: Nobody cares but me.

Lennox: That's you, Marlowe. You're a born loser.

Marlowe: Yeah, I even lost my cat.

With that, Marlowe shoots Lennox and walks away. There are no metaphors in Altman's film for evil and corruption other than sexual ones. The police try to rattle Marlowe's nonchalance by accusing him of being a "fag." When the police lieutenant comes in to question him, the exchange is totally sexual.

Lt.: Did you know him (Lennox) in college?

Marlowe: I didn't go to college.

Lt.: Was he cheating on his wife?

Marlowe: Is your wife cheating on you?

Lt.: Book him.

Marlowe: Fuck you.

Lt.: Stand in line, baby.

All relationships are both determined and tainted by sex.

Wade says to Eileen: "When a writer can't write, it's like being impotent." She responds: "I know what that's like too." He blows up: "Oh, you do, huh? ... Balls!" His exclamation is also his problem. Both of Marlowe's confrontations with gangster Marty Augustine (Mark Rydell) are also sexual. In the first, Marty says to his moll, JoAnn (JoAnn Brody): "I sleep with a lot of girls, but I make love to you." He then breaks a coke bottle on her face. He turns to Marlowe and says: "That's someone I love. You, I don't even like."

In the second encounter, Augustine demands that all the men undress in front of the patched-up JoAnn. Augustine provides a self-parody which is also a parody of the relationship between all gangsters and sex:

Marty: I used to be self-conscious. I never had any pubic hair until I was fifteen.

Marlowe: You musta looked like one of the three little pigs.

Everyone's got kinks in this film. Everyone plays out elaborate stylized roles (detective, cop, writer, doctor, gangster) in order to cover up sexual

fears or inadequacies. Altman parodies each of his characters by exposing their sexual Achilles heel.

But the chief vehicle of satire in this film is the metaphor of film itself. Where Bogart's film is clearly a film noir, Altman's film is a fantasy, a film about films. The big city is replaced by Hollywood, and all of the actors are using pseudonyms for their real names. Terry Lennox's real name is Lenny Potts; Roger Wade's real name is Billy Joe Smith; Marlowe, himself, tells the police his name is Sidney Jenkins, We will return to these name changes.

When Marlowe is taken to police headquarters, he is photographed in one of those dime store four-for-a-quarter machines. He clowns and makes faces. After he is fingerprinted, he wipes the ink all over his face and does an abbreviated impression of Al Jolson singing "Sewanee". The cop at the gate of Malibu Colony does film impressions: Cary Grant, Jimmy Stewart, Walter Brennan. Malibu Colony, itself, is famous for its movie star inhabitants. For Roger Wade, Marlowe becomes Marlboro, the Duke of Bullshit. He pinpoints Marlowe's role when he says: "I wish you'd take that goddamn J. C. Penney tie off." (Note Altman's irony: when Marlowe goes in to try to save Wade from drowning, all that he takes off is his tie. Wade drowns anyway.)

Marlowe, himself, criticizes both sides of the law based on film stereotypes. He tells the police: "Is this where I'm supposed to say: 'What's this all about?' and you say 'Shut up, I'll ask the questions!'" Marty Augustine's hood, Harry, looks like a film hood with his pin-striped dark suit and his white tie. Because of his dress, he looks out of place in this Hollywood fantasy. Marlowe tells him: "Harry, Harry. You're a first-grade hood." Altman exploits this type for a film joke within the film. Marlowe tells the cop at Malibu Colony that the man following him is a Walter Brennan fan. Harry, of course, cannot guess the impersonation, since he is a "gangster-type" and since Walter Brennan is a "western-type". Thus, Marlowe uses film to temporarily "ditch" Harry. Later, when Marlowe goes for his second confrontation with Marty Augustine, he hears Augustine begin: "What we have here is a problem of communication..." (COOL-HAND LUKE). And when Marty demands that everyone strip, one of his boys suggests that "George (Raft) never took off his clothes." A gangster without his clothes is no longer a gangster.

Still later, Marlowe is hit by a car. Altman has another joke at our expense. The next visual is of a man in a hospital bed, bandaged from head to foot. We think it is Marlowe. The camera pans right to show Marlowe in the next bed, (This is still better than Altman's other camera joke when Roger Wade says: "I'm all I'm all... I'm all turned around," and the camera turns around as he turns around.) Marlowe gets out of his hospital bed and dresses quickly. He says to the bandaged figure: "You're gonna be okay. I seen all your pictures too," a reference to The Mummy (mixing the genres again!).

The last film allusion is another set-up by Altman. Throughout the film,

the music we hear is that of the theme song, "The Long Goodbye." But at the film's conclusion, as Marlowe walks by Eileen Wade in her yellow car, the fading music of the film is "Hurray for Hollywood." Marlowe, himself, is the conductor, giving the cue for the song by blowing on the miniature harmonica that the "Mummy" had given him in the hospital.

But Altman is not content with an internal spoof (satire that exists within the film). He constructs an external spoof too: a level of satire that demands that the viewer have some extra-cinematic knowledge as well to appreciate the film. The use of pseudonyms for "real" names is the key. Within the film we learn that Terry Lennox's real name is Lenny Potts. Altman is suggesting a real name beyond that: Jim Bouton, When Marlowe and Lennox play their game of trivia in Marlowe's apartment, what does Marlowe ask for his trivia question? "Who were the three DiMaggio brothers?" Lennox, of course, knows the answer, for he is Jim Bouton, former baseball pitcher for the New York Yankees and author of *Ball Four*, the book that told all about baseball players. When Marlowe discusses Wade's name-change and writing with Eileen, the discussion again becomes double-edged, because we know that she is Nina Van Pallandt, former lover and confidante of Clifford Irving, whose fake biography of Howard Hughes "told all" too. Henry Gibson,, as Doctor Veringer, wears the same white suit he wore all the time on television's *Laugh-In*. We expect him to come out with a daisy and deliver a made-up poem on clean air. Roger Wade makes other allusions when speaking of him: "Oh no, it's Minnie Mouse. The White Knight. Derringer. The White Pistol." Nobody takes anybody else seriously in this satire.

The one allusion which still intrigues me comes in the final credits: "With special remembrance for Dan Blocker" (Hoss in the old *Bonanza* series). Did he help the cop with the Walter Brennan impression? Was he in a crowd scene somewhere? Or did he die when the film was being made?

Tracing the sex metaphors and the film allusion is about all one can do with Altman here. Everything (the beautiful photography, the horrible acting, the "hip" but horrendous script) "works," if you're thinking "satire" when you see the film. The problem, however, is this: Bogart's MARLOWE works very well as a film noir on its own; in addition, it works as a satire. With Altman's film, there is only the satire, for the plot is flimsy and the suspense transparent. We know from the outset that Lennox is guilty, that Eileen is implicated, and that Marlowe has been had. The only surprise left is that Marlowe doesn't know, and further that he even has the guts to shoot Lennox at the end., It's not enough to change our opinion of Gould-Marlowe. He remains poached.

### Performance. Walkabout. Don't Look Now Nicholas Roeg Permutations without profundity

by Chuck Kleinhans

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In his three films to date Nicholas Roeg has established himself as one of the important young British directors. But precisely what his importance is is not certain. His debut film, co-directed with Donald Cammel, *PERFORMANCE* (completed 1968, released 1970), combined the appeal of superstar Mick Jagger, drugs, sex, violence, and rock music. When released it was generally abhorred by establishment reviewers but quickly became a cult film among the young, and it retains its status among the great stoned features of recent years (*YELLOW SUBMARINE*, 2001, *VANISHING POINT*, *EL TOPO*, etc.). Roeg's solo effort, *WALKABOUT* (1971), had light scattered attention in the U.S., but now seems to be going through a film club revival. With *DON'T LOOK NOW* (1973) Roeg entered the big budget stage. The film was extremely well received by the reviewing establishment, with slight reservations about its trick ending. Exhibition was mixed. In Chicago, for example, it opened in an art house for a moderate run, and then went into the neighborhoods as second feature to a slick schlock thriller, *THE POSSESSION OF JOEL DELANEY*.

From these three films Roeg's trademarks are very clear: a beautiful color cinematography, extensive intercutting, a willingness to be mildly experimental (e.g., electronic music), use of actors thought of as limited—or limited acting roles for them—and a basic thematic preoccupation with the sudden collision of different cultures or lifestyles, throwing questions of self-identity into relief and ending in death for one of the main characters. Whether these characteristics are sufficient to sustain a director's career, or to form the basis for distinguished achievement within commercial cinema, remains problematic.

Roeg's basic appeal rests on his camerawork. He began as a cameraman and achieved his first recognition for excellent work on films such as *THE CARETAKER*, *PETULIA*, *THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH*,

FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD, FAHRENHEIT 451, and the second unit work in LAWRENCE OF ARABIA. In the cinematography of his own films, he uses a generally static camera. Each shot displays a mastery of composition, framing, focus, color qualities of the film stock, movement within the frame, and lenses. As much could be said about a good still photographer, and for someone as accomplished in photography as he is, it is curious that Roeg does not exploit the motion picture camera's potential by moving the camera or using zooms more frequently. Even the few times Roeg changes from his static pattern, such as a subjective camera shot down at a character's legs walking in WALKABOUT, one is frequently not at all sure why the shot is there since many times his subjective shots have no clear narrative function.

Roeg is a master of the still life, composition in two planes, and the wide angle close up. But it is mastery, not innovation. In his visuals he falls solidly within the current mainstream of the commercial graphic arts. Virtually every shot is faintly familiar. It could be found in the POPULAR PHOTOGRAPHY ANNUAL of a decade earlier. Which is not wrong, or bad, but it helps explain the ease with which Roeg is understood by his audiences, straight and stoned. Within commercial film, his camerawork is new and fresh. But that is a measure of the relative backwardness of commercial cinematography compared with its equivalent in still photography.

#### JUXTAPOSITION AS ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE

In employing his footage, Roeg builds his films on polar contrasts. Sometimes this is simply a gimmick, as in the opening minutes of PERFORMANCE, where he mechanically moves the audience by showing the opening and closing of doors and drawers to link events at different places and times. But usually his contrasts have a thematic purpose. In WALKABOUT the opening sequence establishes the idea of a modern city with various shots, which are then juxtaposed in editing with shots of the outback, the Australian wilderness. The same type of contrast is quickly developed in individual shots as well. The six year old boy we will soon find is a principal character walks home in his neat blue schoolboy's blazer and cap, through a park or botanical garden with well labeled trees. Roeg revels in such antitheses: city/ country, civilization/ wilderness, label/ tree, unnatural/ natural. In WALKABOUT the contrasts go on throughout the film. Indeed they form the bulk of the story: two urban children, a 14 year old girl and her younger brother, are taken into the wilderness by their father who unsuccessfully attempts to kill them and who then suicides. The pair attempt to survive and eventually encounter a 16 year old native who is on his initiation "walkabout"—a period of lone survival in the outback which proves his worthiness for manhood. He returns them to civilization, dying when they reach it.

In PERFORMANCE the basic juxtaposition is of two demi-worlds, that of racketeer Harry Flowers and that of a rock music recluse, as we follow a London strong-arm man, Chas (James Fox) on the lam from his boss

into the drug world of a fallen rock star, Turner (Mick Jagger). The contrast in DON'T LOOK NOW is basically between prescience and coincidence, with the wife (Julie Christie) accepting the unexplainable while her husband (Donald Sutherland) rationalistically rejects his "sixth sense."

Cinematically, the contrasts in Roeg's films are continuous. In WALKABOUT, for example, the urban children are first seen together in a swimming pool next to a body of natural water. Their western urban clothing is contrasted with the native's belt of snakes. The urban pair rely on verbal language and find security in the voices on their transistor radio, while communication with the young hunter is effective only through gesture, etc. At times Roeg's fascination with visual antonyms is almost bludgeoning. The native hunts with spear and hands while Europeans are shown killing game with a rifle fired from a jeep. Cutting apart a kangaroo for dinner in the wild is opposed to an urban butcher shop. A burning auto is crosscut with a roasting animal carcass. These juxtapositions—and WALKABOUT is especially loaded with them—are a Lévi-Strauss type of structuralist's perfect data ... but they lack any especial meaning. In WALKABOUT the establishing sequence at the beginning gives us the contrast, but the contrast is then continued for the rest of the film in an all too predictable vein.

For Roeg juxtaposition is basic, but he does not follow Eisenstein's idea of montage establishing a synthesis of a higher order than the individual shots. Nor does he succeed in using contrasts in a metaphoric, oxymoronic, or even ambiguous way. Rather juxtaposition is presented, and in being simply presented, it gives a kind of implied irony. Roeg seems to repeat again and again,

"See the difference between artificiality and naturalness. You and I can see it in this image or set of images, but the characters in the film cannot, and this is our superiority."

But he also stacks the cards against the characters who provide the dramatic point of view. His 14 year old adolescent girl/woman (a contrast Roeg underlines) is old enough, sufficiently socialized, to opt for civilization without thought. Yet she is young enough that she has insufficient self-consciousness to choose her own life, or a different one from her parent's and society's expectations. She does not really learn or change or grow from her experience. And this peculiarly static young woman will, of course, be married, and routinized. As Roeg shows us at the end, she will have a glimmer of an idyllic past that might have been, but no way of relating that to her present with a husband babbling on about his promotion up the corporate ladder. It is a strangely frozen fantasy. This girl/woman is as unchanging in her nature as the pantyhose she wears while climbing small buttes and rough terrain and which never become dirty or torn. Roeg does not explore psychological change, but psychological stasis and its inevitable end in death or sterility.

Chas' character and actions provide another example of Roeg's interest



in basically static personality. While *PER FORMANCE* uses an essentially familiar storyline, that of the pursuer and pursued, the directors choose not to focus on the pursuer, as in the detective variant, nor really on the pursuit or pursued, as in chase films—any of which tend to give an automatic inexorability to the plot. Rather the film takes Chas initially in his daily activities (lovemaking) and his job (enforcer for Harry Flowers). It is soon clear that Chas is basically a follower, for in Harry Flower's homosexual gang, strict obedience is expected and demanded. So when Chas messes up, he must run for his life. He does not run very far, merely to another part of London where he expects to find a room in Turner's house. What he finds is Turner and two female companions living in seclusion in a house that is a museum of objects to experience while drugged, a freak's closet of sensory experience. Once there it is logical for Chas to stay put, but he seeks to arrange an escape from the country, which is his undoing. While all four members of Turner's household are hiding from the outside world, Chas cannot accept the refuge. Again he is the follower who gets in trouble, this time for the last time in his life.

Roeg's use of juxtaposition to present a surface complexity is most dazzling in *PERFORMANCE*, where the Mick Jagger character is given to fantasies and at one point becomes a person he has never met: Harry Flowers. At another point, during a courtroom trial, suddenly the jurors are inexplicably watching a film. Then Roeg cuts to a protection racket shakedown of a pornography filmmaker with a porn flick in the background showing whipping, which is paralleled later with the whipping of Chas. (As an aside, a friend who has studied much of the Kinsey Institute film collection informs me that a whipping sequence is obligatory in British porn films.) The entire second part of the *PERFORMANCE* approximately duplicates much of the dialogue of the first half, as well as having its own set of parallels and contrasts between protagonists.

But for all of his intriguing kaleidoscopic multiplication of images (especially if you are stoned), Roeg leaves us with a series that adds up to nothing in particular. There is much time exploring images. Cammel's "script" (apparently the film was roughed out in story and detailed day by shooting day, à la Godard), offers the camera little else to do. Jagger as rockstar recluse and James Fox as man-on-the-run change clothes, wigs, and other styles, but do not develop as characters. They are a fitting pair, unable to change themselves, but willing to exchange identities with each other. If *PERFORMANCE* were the slightest bit comic, one could enjoy it as a mock profundity. But it is not comic, and after viewing, the film leaves an aftertaste of depressing strained seriousness in dealing with well-worn illusion/reality materials. Indeed, the cult reception of this film at colleges as something incredibly "new" says more about undergraduate ignorance of Pirandello, Cocteau, and a hundred others than it does about Roeg's and Cammel's talent.

The combination of excellent photography, straining always at the naturally beautiful or fascinating, an elementary narrative that never

becomes as pure as a fable or Märchen and a merely ironic use of contrast manages to sustain 90 minutes or so, but never moves any of Roeg's films to a higher level than the sum of its disparate parts. This is interesting—even fascinating—and Roeg's freedom from conventional film narration is refreshing, but it is also limiting. There are only a few times in WALKABOUT when his simplistic contrasts move into a more sophisticated series of transformations. On the simplest level such transformations come from, for example, intercutting the heroine's idyllic swimming sequence with the hero's hunting actions. The swimming sequence goes on so long that it finally becomes more than Roeg's fascination with undulations of a female figure underwater and is changed into a contrast of the lyric and simply pictorially beautiful contrasted with the practical and forceful action of the hunter. Another sequence which gains force instead of merely stating is the intercutting of the female torso and legs with tree trunks branching in two. Both sequences —swimming/ hunting and torso/ tree—are sufficiently extended in time to go beyond a simple narrative function to make a statement about life and nature ... though the statements are hardly very profound or ingenious.

When Roeg is able to use contrast to develop his narrative, he excels, as in the bedroom sequence in DON'T LOOK NOW. Bereaved by the sudden death of their daughter, John and Laura Baxter, in Venice where he is helping restore a church, are distanced from each other because of the sorrow they feel. A seer tells Laura she can "see" their daughter, and Laura has a new sense of happiness. That evening the couple makes love, perhaps for the first time since the tragedy. They are shown in a long intercut sequence of lovemaking, with much caressing, done very unsensationally, and dressing afterwards to go out to dinner. The dressing is done slowly, with the pair basking in the afterglow of sex. Taken together the two time periods merge, showing the maturity of their relationship, its tenderness, and depth. Here Roeg expands sex into love, no small accomplishment.

Achieving a richer meaning through visuals is unfortunately rare in Roeg's films. The bedroom scene is equaled only in a passage in WALKABOUT, as the trio leaves the outback. With the wanderers' return to civilization, Roeg's previous simplicity wanes slightly and his earlier contrasts—which remained on the level of flying bird/ jet plane, and burned-out car/ oddity for the natives—begin to darken and deepen. The hunter brings the children to a European farm house, but the settlement turns out to be abandoned and falling into decay. Magazine illustrations from the 40s and a box of old family photographs are the only human figures in the place. For no clear reason the frontier farm has been abandoned and is becoming a natural piece of the outback. A mood is established: slightly melancholy, slightly subdued, slightly decayed. This is the film's first real evidence of change. There is a highway nearby; the children will leave. As always the girl insists on cleaning and washing—a ritual to make them suitable for civilization.

Images of death are presented. The hunter is shown attacking a bull-like

animal barehanded. The same type of animal is shown being shot by urban hunters. The same type of animal is shown dying, stuck in a drying waterhole. The dead bones are seen. Among bones the camera finds the black skinned native with his body painted in white. The hunter begins a dance ritual around the farmhouse. While it is not clear if the dance is a courtship ceremony, from the young woman's point of view, it may be. In any case, it is clear that she fears being raped and is effectively a prisoner in the house while the young man dances without stop outside. In the morning he appears to be gone, and is then found dead, hanging by his arms in a tree. The cause of or reason for his death is unstated. The urban children leave for the road and the camera shows images of debris. The abandoned portable radio suddenly blares out a message. Images of decay continue. In this Roeg achieves a poetic evocation of the young woman's decision to return to her people, of the young man's apparently self-willed death, of the sad impossibility resulting from the accidental juxtaposition of these characters at this time under these circumstances.

The sequence, effective within itself, cannot carry the burden of the whole film, though by default it must. The film runs along for most of its length on the simple continued addition of contrasts and this sudden multiplication of meanings and levels only emphasizes the poverty of what precedes and follows rather than raising the film as a whole to a more majestic complexity.

#### ROEG'S SIMPLE MESSAGE

It can be argued that Roeg's obviousness in all his films is not a fault, unless one would also claim Hitchcock's obviousness, say, is a flaw. And there's a truth in that. Roeg's moral universe is a simple given in his films, a given as immediate and tangible as we find in melodrama. Through his use of visuals for constant contrasts, the director raises a bare but lofty moral superstructure at the start of his films. In much the same way, through dramatic simplification and abstraction through music, most opera gives us a simplicity one can easily accept. It would be wrong to interrogate Roeg's films for consistent logical narrative development or for realistic psychology, just as it is missing the point to question opera on the same points.

The texture, not the framework, is what is interesting. Roeg is fascinated with singular detail. Turner's house is the best example—a series of chambers filled with freaky things, from inlaid tables to dirty dishes. In *PERFORMANCE*, detail serves a narrative function, but in *DON'T LOOK NOW* it runs off on its own. Laura Baxter uses a Rapidograph pen: of course she does—Oxford chic—but the detail is merely there. We are forced to notice it; but for what end? Just to say, "Ah yes, she uses a Rapidograph"? But that is to give the viewer information about style, not character. Similarly, Roeg's camera pursues textures with a vengeance: bedroom walls with Rococo decoration, mosaics, embroidered blouses, the seer's unusual jeweled pin. This attention to style is forced on the audience until one almost comes to expect to read

the labels on the character's clothing, so we'll know it came from the right shop.

But this trait also shows a curious lack of narrative control, which is more problematic when Roeg uses color. He cleverly inverts our expectations of Venice, presenting neither J.M.W. Turner's phosphorescent white city, nor Visconti's sculpted array of colors. Instead Venice is winter grey, and wet, and at night a colorless dark. A single accent color is chosen, red, which generally has a narrative use. The daughter was wearing a red raincoat when she drowned; John Baxter foresaw her death when a drop of water on a slide he was watching flowed red from landing on the daughter's coat pictured in the slide, becoming a full screen symbol of bleeding. In a church we see reddish candle flames and a red votive light. Laura wears bright red boots at one point. When John is installing a huge grotesque head on the exterior of the church he is restoring we see red marks on it.

But from time to time we also find apparently gratuitous red presented. For no reason John at one point toys with a piece of Venetian glass with a red bottom. The audience is primed to think it must mean something, but what it means is not at all clear. Perhaps it is just part of the visual texture. And Roeg's films bear repeated viewing for that very curious texture, in the same way that *THE HELLSTROM CHRONICLE* does, provided you can dismiss the "story." But this argument runs down at a crucial point, which is this: You can appreciate Roeg on that level only so long as you hold in abeyance his irony, which itself makes a statement on the action. Roeg does not merely stand apart from his characters, but constantly above them, and has us share that position.

In *PERFORMANCE*, for all the tricks of cutting, costumes, masks, roles, and fantasy sequences, we remain voyeurs, ironic voyeurs. We find Roeg building the film on contrasts which presumably comment on each other. A lawyer defending his client as being involved in a legitimate merger, not a forced takeover, is intercut with a racketeer making the same distinction. Business equals crime ... a startling equation only to the upper middle class intelligentsia who think of Brecht's *THREE PENNY OPERA* as another musical. The other contrasts and parallels function on about the same level. Disguising oneself from pursuers is paralleled with wearing a costume for fun; red paint is paralleled with blood, and so forth.

The most effective parallels and contrasts in *PERFORMANCE* involve identities, social roles, sexual roles, disguises, costumes, and performances. In the last analysis it adds up to permutations without profundity. Roeg puts the film characters and the film audience through a lot of changes, but to no apparent end. Granted, that carefully going through the film one can find traces of references to Jorge Luis Borges, Bergman's *PERSONA*, painters Francis Bacon, Richard Hamilton, and Peter Blake. But in the flow of the film they are not picked up, or if they are (merged faces from *PERSONA*, a pretty obvious one), they don't add anything, not even self-congratulation at having caught it. If the outside

references mean anything, particularly to a stoned audience, it is merely as part of the cultural ambiance of our times, and it would be pretentious to make anything out of it as far as criticism of the film goes. But, one feels Roeg really *is* trying to make something more out of his films than simple mental massages or mind candy for freaks. In a recent *Sight and Sound* interview (Winter 1973-74) he confesses his

“fascination with the discovery of identity. I can't but be amazed at the reinvention of people—people seem to be reinventing themselves all the time ... You can take it on a social level: you can take it on all sorts of levels ... I think it's a destructive thing, because it gets one further away from solving the puzzle ... By changing identity you're getting further away from where you fit in, because you are putting yourself in another hole.”

It is probably significant that Roeg here uses the word “identity”—indicating a somewhat superficial part of the self—rather than terms which imply the whole being such as “character,” “self,” or “existence” or which infer a deeper level such as “essence” or “soul.” In any case, how are we to reconcile this earnest claim with the visual evidence of Roeg's imagination spewing contrasts in near-desperate abandon? The semblance of order and rationality in his films is constantly being broken by irrationality and disorder.

Chas as protection racket enforcer lives with crisp manners, meticulous clothes, nearly clinical sex. Yet in a few more film minutes he is lolling in a drug induced looseness, wearing a bizarre unruly wig, and falling in with the polymorphous eroticism of Turner's house. On their own terms the world of Harry Flowers' gang or of Turner's house is logical and coherent, but the intersection of the two when Chas hides out at Turner's leads to disorder and death, just as the meeting point of city and outback does, and the joining of prescience and rationality does.

Another way of looking at what Roeg is doing is by considering what he is choosing not to do. The WALKABOUT story line is the familiar one of people from civilization surviving in nature. Its lineage is older than its first great example, ROBINSON CRUSOE, and in recent times it has been especially popular in science fiction. Defoe, the first important bourgeois English novelist, wrote his version as a celebration of the individual. Robinson is the classic middle class man who even in solitude can establish an economy of production and consumption. We appreciate his self-confidence, ingenuity, and optimism. In Defoe's version the story affirms individual wit and self-reliance, traits which are generally stressed in the story line's tradition. The civilized person in nature theme almost always focuses on establishing a functioning economy. (Thoreau begins WALDEN with a long chapter on economy, in various senses of the word.) Most of our interest is in the techniques, attempts, setbacks and inevitable triumphs of the protagonist in doing so. The story's other emphasis is on sustaining social relations. Robinson meets his man Friday, the Swiss Family Robinson maintains

the traditional European family in the wilds, etc., etc. Even in dark inversions and ironic distortions, such as LORD OF THE FLIES, the question of social relations is central, as it is in other variants on the theme such as the lost platoon or drifting lifeboat versions.

Roeg changes both of these traditional interests quite drastically. Rather than the characteristic documentary concern with the means of survival—what we could call the WHOLE EARTH CATALOG approach to the theme—he gives us a six and a fourteen year old who are pitifully unable to survive alone. Roeg could have dismissed the economic basis by putting his protagonists in an Edenic setting, but he chooses a harsh environment and then ignores the nature of a hunting and foraging economy. He shows it, to be sure, but he carefully avoids, any depth consideration of it. For Roeg, survival is no achievement, and civilization socializes out any native capacity for survival. Curiously, Roeg also chooses not to explore the social dimension of this theme. Again, he shows it, but he does not really examine it. Rather he gives us very essentialist characters: a static girl/woman, her brother who is a mere chorus to her, and the young native hunter who remains interesting but impenetrable since we cannot understand his language, his culture, or his motivations. It is a given that this young woman and this young man meet, but they can never really interact. Roeg shows a dilemma and refuses to comment on it. It is near-tragedy in a moral vacuum.

The same could be said of PERFORMANCE. In their own ways the worlds of Harry Flowers and of Turner are decadent (in a descriptive, not a pejorative sense), within the film. And the effect of Turner on Chas clearly cannot last, cannot result in a “better” Chas, cannot emerge on a higher plane for either of them. With inevitable progression we watch an inherently unstable situation come into being, shimmer for a while, and then end.

Are these two films just exercises in melancholy voyeurism? Apparently so, unless one is to take Roeg’s clodhopper homilies seriously such as the quote from A. E. Housman near the end of WALKABOUT, which transforms the Victorian’s genteel stoicism into an Edgar Guest platitude. Apparently so, unless one is to find the references to Borges in PERFORMANCE carrying the film to a more philosophical level than business equals crime.

DON'T LOOK NOW plays with the reality/ appearance mind game evoked naturally by the long *aminita muscaria* trip section in PERFORMANCE, but without resolving the question. In PERFORMANCE it is acceptable because it is excused by the consciousness change of being drugged. In DON'T LOOK NOW it is coyly jejune because the protagonist keeps asking rational questions, and when they are not answered, we feel cheated by the *demon ex machina* at the end. While the film depicts the recurring polarity sacrifice/ salvation, in terms of the central character there is no “development” but only a wavering, an oscillating between different impulses, which perfectly fits his social role as intellectual, but which

allows a complete evasion of the questions raised, like the joke that makes the listener the teller's fool. Thus the parallels (a table tipping over/John on a scaffold that tips over; the grotesque stone head he installs/the deformed dwarf who murders him), and the repetitions (the color red; a recurrent funeral barge), and the echoes (the couple being told the church they are in front of is that of St. Nicholas, patron saint of children and scholars) serve to structure the film in a way that we constantly expect to make connections, to link one image with another, one detail with others, and so forth. This expectation is sometimes gratified, as in the lovemaking episode when two rituals are combined into a truth, but more often it is disappointed.

But, to take Roeg's side, he is not really interested in answering the reality/ appearance puzzle, but rather in using it as a device to talk about behavior. For Roeg the question is irrelevant or unsolvable, so the real question become how should you act? Clearly John Baxter is wrong in following his pattern of skeptical rationality—it kills him. Truth is not to be pursued, but to be glimpsed fleetingly, and even then you are not sure of having seen it. But Laura Baxter, by simply accepting, ends up with only a double bereavement. Posed in this way it is as absurd a reductionism as the evangelist's "Granted we can't know, but if there is even the slightest chance that there is a God and heaven, shouldn't one ..." Yet Roeg's "message" is especially simplistic: better to accept animism and have security in that than lose your life in a remarkably silly pursuit.

## CONFUSION AS RESOLUTION

Roeg's films lend themselves to Freudian interpretation easily, almost too easily (which itself says something about them). He is fascinated with the basic oral fantasy of engulfment, of losing the boundaries of one's self. This is often phrased in terms of varieties of animism: the supernatural, the uncanny, déjà vu, magic, the occult, transformation, verbal formulas, telepathy, and a sense of helplessness in the face of another. In addition, his work is full of transformed primal scene fantasies (darkness, vagueness, the unknown, changing shapes, nakedness, appearing/ disappearing, fighting and struggle, blood, phallic weapons) and their defense fantasies (quietness, motionlessness, sleep, death).

In children, belief in animism shows an unawareness of their own subjectivity. In adults it is an attempt to repress their subjectivity. Since Freud, Anglo-American culture has rested uneasily with the knowledge that subjectivity, including the subconscious, exists. The uneasiness stems largely from our Puritan heritage, which asserts that the individual is responsible for his/her conscious self, and now also responsible for his/her emotional and unconscious self as well. That's heavy ... and coming to terms with it is perhaps one of the last steps to maturity in our time. Acceptance of one's emotional self is what most (middle class) therapy is aimed at, after all. The error, obviously, comes from putting all that responsibility on the individual without recognizing

the social shaping of every individual's personal psychology. Animism, especially in its current fads, is comforting because it displaces one's subjectivity and in turn one's responsibility for it. Wouldn't we all like to be able to say every once in a while, along with the implicit message of THE EXORCIST, "the Devil made me do it" ? Though shoddy theology, it is satisfying on the level of the everyday.

Laura Baxter's belief in animism turns out to be safe, while her husband's denial of it propels him into death, which is obviously unsafe. Similarly, Chas is safe in so long as he remains in Turner's womb/tomb house, but his attempted rational outwitting of Harry Flowers trips him up and leads to his undoing. In contrast, Turner does not will his own death so much as enact a yoga of death. It is the last experience, tasting the final unknown, and something he'd been flirting with via the mushroom. But in the end we remain outside of Turner's decisions. It is change itself that is questioned, and in a rather saddening way. If you experience a new consciousness when you are part of the urban/ outback or gangster/ hippie or natural/ supernatural confrontation, things become unsettled for you. There is danger in it and it turns out badly, ending in death.

Roeg's plot situations are patently ridiculous if poked at rationally, which is to say that they are not what they appear to be. The films are really about the finding and loss of innocence. The world is post-Edenic, even the outback is, but perhaps one can find a hint of innocence through drugs, in finding the rare idyllic parts of the outback, through investigating the Venetian labyrinth. But whatever is found cannot hold. Turner's place cannot be defended against the Flowers crew, one must return to the city, the pursuer ends up pursued. And therein lies the melancholy.

Roeg raises our anxieties only to assure us that the murderer is, after all, not like us and the victim is not like us either. This separation of the audience and subject at hand allows him to present a Gothic cinema but without our, or his, implication in it. Roeg composes films around imaginary potentials: that the hunted can hide, that innocence can be found, that rationality is sufficient. He then proceeds to show that possibility as untenable. But since we feel no part of the process, since we simply observe it, we can finally dismiss it. We are voyeurs at a process that ends by affirming that the only thing we can be sure of in life is a melancholy confusion.

With Ken Russell, Roeg shares a deep and obvious Romantic concern with the elemental in life: emotion, passion, the subjective. Both are constantly making it a major part of their films. But the difference between the two is more interesting than this obvious similarity. Roeg presents the *contrast* of rational and emotional; naturalness and instinct are thwarted and distorted. In this he is like G  net: defining one thing by its complementary—master and slave form a symbiotic relation. If Roeg takes G  net's approach, we could say that Russell takes William Burroughs': total immersion in one thing which by implication shows



the opposite. With Russell's films one always senses that the path of excess finally leads to the palace of wisdom, though the wisdom is not explicit. The orgiastic frenzy of *THE DEVILS* subsides to let us know that barbarism cannot hold, it is intolerable, whatever the alternative. *SAVAGE MESSIAH* ends logically with Gaudier-Brzeska's *oeuvre*, for his sculpture is the achievement of order, beauty, and certainty out of the chaos of his life. A mind like Russell's can relax only in the theatre, where everything is possible, and even urged. *THE BOY FRIEND* allows a precision and perfection never attainable in life's messiness and unrounded corners.

Roeg does not find artifice a solution, an imposing of order on disparate reality an accomplishment. Actually he transports his characters to exotic environments: Turner's house, the outback, Venice. Artifice in Roeg's films is thrown up for a hall of mirrors effect. Turner's persona/makeup/ mask is shared by Chas in his shopping for a costume. One exchanges identities but never attains a final one save in death. And death is an end to the clashing imbalance of life. But even when chosen or willed, it provides only a single certainty—that time stops, that the melancholy confusion ends, for the individual who dies.

Roeg and Russell solve their Romanticism in different ways. Russell's ends in aestheticism: art lasts, it is more important than an individual's life. Implicitly this affirms social life—art is a form of communication. Roeg's characters lean to the decadent resolution of Romanticism, and throughout confuse life and art, reality and appearance, and in the end affirm neither.

The appeal of Roeg's films to date rests on different qualities for different audiences. For the user of mild psychedelic drugs, *PERFORMANCE*, and to a lesser extent the other two films, provides a great multiplicity of visual and aural inputs. However the users often confuse the undeniable plethora of impressions, and its pleasantness, with indicating a meaningfulness and aesthetic complexity which is not there on sober examination. Somewhat overlapping this audience is the appeal of the first two films to late adolescents, who seek in film art an experience, a knowledge, a statement in a somewhat different form. This too, Roeg certainly provides, but exploring "identity" rather than "being" has its limits for viewers who have moved on from the former to the latter in their own experience. For people especially interested in film as an art, Roeg is very interesting in his willingness to exploit film as film and for his ability to work in the commercial feature system successfully while pushing the uniquely filmic over standard melodramatic film narrative. With *DON'T LOOK NOW* Roeg demonstrated his appeal for film goers who prefer classy entertainment, though he did so by focusing on characters and a life style that seems right out of the ad pages of the *New Yorker*.

In his first three films Nicholas Roeg has established his importance and indicated his potential. What he does with that potential seems a very open question. In his use of the unique possibilities of film within the

commercial system, he seems one of the most promising younger directors. Potentially, he has even more promise of developing along these lines than Robert Altman. But the biggest obstacle to his development at this point seems to be his limited themes and ideas. Roeg faces a choice between being a slick entertainer and doing more of the same, or advancing his creativity and imagination. He could be a very good entertainer, especially if he discards his pretensions to saying something about Life and develops the excellent comic gift he showed in the hotelkeeper's role in DON'T LOOK NOW. If Roeg wants to make films which are indeed serious, on the other hand, he will have to move beyond his current simplistic message and find a content to match his technical complexity and sophistication.

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[To top](#)   [Current issue](#)   [Archived essays](#)   [Jump Cut home](#)

### Jean-Pierre Gorin interviewed Filmmaking and history

by Christian Braad Thomsen

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Q: How and when did you meet Jean-Luc Godard?

A : That was in 1965, when I was connected with a political group that published CAHIERS MARXISTES-LENINISTES. Godard had seen the issues we had published and wanted to meet one of us during his research on LA CHINOISE. He was seeing a lot of people from various leftwing groups. So we started to discuss movies, which is also to discuss all sorts of problems about movies and which, in turn, produce the kind of movies we have. And we started to discuss politics and aesthetics and aesthetics as a kind of politics. It went on as a kind of loose relationship the following years. I was not directly involved in the script of LA CHINOISE. But many of the things I told him, which were often jokes, were later put in LA CHINOISE. Jean-Luc has always had a great capacity for having his eyes and ears open and for picking up things and working them out in his own context. Long before meeting him I recognized that his films were the only revolutionary films being made in France. I remember the opening of LES CARABINIERES in 1963. Only nine people saw the film, and I was one of them.

Q: Many Marxist-Leninists criticized LA CHINOISE for being petit-bourgeois when it opened. What did you as a Marxist-Leninist think?

A: I had mixed feelings. First I was completely furious, because I was taking myself damned seriously at that time, and I was offended by the kind of image Jean-Luc was presenting of groups I was working with. Many people thought he was making fools out of us, but it was more complicated than that, and actually the film did capture the real spirit of the movement at that time. It was a realistic account, not a critical one at all. Jean-Luc had great sympathy for all those movements—for the youthfulness of it all.

At that time I found the form of the film highly satisfactory. But then we have seen it again after we started working together, and we found that the film is really very traditional in the narrative, and in a lot of aspects

it seems to us to be obsolete today. It is less advanced than TWO OR THREE THINGS I KNOW ABOUT HER or MASCULINE FEMININE or even MADE IN U.S.A.—which I didn't like at all when I first saw it, but which is still a very interesting film in its attempt to link together two words which have a lot more in common than the first two letters : politics and poetry.

Our discussions became more specific and centered around aesthetic points. We both had a strong need for a radical change in the aesthetics of cinema, which at first doesn't seem political at all, but in fact is. After WEEKEND Jean-Luc went into a state of crisis. He tried to film in 16mm, but decided to throw the material away. And then he made the cinetracts of May 1968 (the massive student and worker strike—ed.), which was a way to make propaganda films and at the same time to show people that films could be made very cheaply and very quickly. In fact his crisis started at the end of 1967, when he went to Cuba to shoot a fiction film, but it was a dead end. He couldn't complete it. After he came back from Cuba, our relationship became very close.

Q: Godard has been quoted as saying that the reason why he started to work with you was that he was on his way out of cinema in order to become political, and you were on your way out of the political camp in order to do cinema.

A: I wanted, for a long time, to make films, but I didn't want to enter the traditional system of filmmaking. So I started to analyze what had been produced in France, and what kind of aesthetics suit the problems I was trying to settle. It became obvious that I couldn't work with anyone else than Jean-Luc. It was a very risky way to get into production, because Jean-Luc had been concentrating entirely on himself and represented all the mystique of the auteur. At the beginning of '68 I was working in a factory after having been thrown out of the newspaper *Le Monde* where I had been a literary critic.

Jean-Luc wanted to do a film with all the various groups in which people tried to live in new ways: groups involved with politics, music, theatre, etc. It was going to be a 24-hour film called "Communications," and he asked me to make the Maoist part of it. So I started writing a script called "A French Movie," based on the experience I had had for two years organizing political groups. I gave the script to Jean-Luc. It was an attempt to put political points into an aesthetic form, and it was never filmed. But all the films we made after '68 are in some way a transformation of this original script: BRITISH SOUNDS, PRAVDA, TOUT VA BIEN, etc.. Jean-Luc brought a lot of reflections to the script and my own evolution with him also added things.

Q: So this script was really the start of the Dziga Vertov group?

A: Yes, but still Jean-Luc made the first films himself: A MOVIE LIKE ANY OTHER, BRITISH SOUNDS, PRAVDA. And afterwards they were credited by the Dziga Vertov group in order to point out that although the films are Jean-Luc's work, they were also a result of the theoretical

discussions between the two of us.

The name of the group was originally a joke, but at the same time it was, of course, a political act in aesthetics. If we want to produce a new kind of aesthetics which is going to suit the fact that we, in our own lives, are experimenting with new contents and new contradictions, we need to mark our work with something that does not exist for the moment: the real history of filmmaking. The history of filmmaking is still written on the same idealistic basis as the whole history of literature. When we took the Dziga Vertov name it was to say, well, although our situation is different, we want to focus on the first filmmaker of the Bolshevik revolution. We didn't want to find ourselves a father, because we are not Freudians, and we didn't want to say that now we are going to do what Dziga Vertov did. We are just saying that Vertov has a concrete experience out of which some problems can be worked out and used for our own purposes.

Q: But so has Eisenstein. What was the reason you chose Vertov?

A: Because Vertov was completely unknown at that time, his real role being completely overshadowed by Eisenstein, and because he was dealing with newsreel material and finally because of the incredible power of Vertov's aesthetic and political writing. It was a way to oppose Eisenstein's glory, and especially the way his glory had been reconstituted into the loose category of bourgeois aesthetics.

Both Eisenstein and Vertov faced a very easy situation, being linked to the political organization which was freeing all the power of the Russian people. This revolutionary power was passing through those two creative individuals. In Eisenstein's writings, as opposed to Vertov's, you see functioning completely different ways for one individual to think and project himself into history. Eisenstein was working as an auteur, and it's obvious that his drive is a very traditional one. Of course Vertov was also an auteur, everyone is, and the problem is not the auteur theory versus another theory. The problem is how one individual thinks about his own individuality. And Vertov—more explicitly than Eisenstein—was dissolving his individuality into the forces of the revolution. The distinction we made between Vertov and Eisenstein doesn't exist in the final analysis. But it was tragic for the kind of aesthetics needed at that time, that Eisenstein and Vertov didn't understand that they were two ends of the same body. We have to study both of them. We have always acted as polemicists and never as academic authorities saying eternal truths when we preferred Vertov to Eisenstein. We prefer them both!

The first film Jean-Luc and I actually did together was WIND FROM THE EAST and then came STRUGGLES IN ITALY and TOUT VA BIEN. Obviously the films couldn't have been made if Jean-Luc didn't have the name he had. And it was very funny to see how STRUGGLES IN ITALY was considered a mad masterpiece when I presented the script, and a genius masterpiece when exactly the same script was proposed by Jean-Luc. Everyone wonders how we work together ... who is responsible for

what, and who says Action!” Well, Jean-Luc says “Ac” and I say “tion. “

Q: But looking at the last three films that you have been directly involved in, those films seem to be politically the most disciplined and clear. So, isn't it true that your main contribution is the clear political analysis of the material?

A: No, I think it's exactly the contrary, because those last three films are the ones I mainly made. My main contribution was to the aesthetics of the films, and it is a complex contribution in the sense that I have always tried to work out something from the things I knew already. And what I knew was the revolutionary potential in the aesthetics that Jean-Luc brought to his previous films. Basically all I have done comes from Jean-Luc's previous work, and that's why some of our last films are considered highly Godardian, even though I made them. That is perfectly normal, because I had a need to go back into his early work and even discover some aspects of his work that he had not discovered himself. Jean-Luc has never taken any stands saying that his previous work was obsolete. He has been quoted as saying that, but it isn't true. I speak a lot with Jean-Luc about his earlier films like *LES CARABINIERS*, *PIERROT LE FOU* or *TWO OR THREE THINGS I KNOW ABOUT HER*. It is obvious that Jean-Luc has been the only one in France to bring some kind of revolution into the field of aesthetics, and we don't start from nowhere. We start from there.

Q: Speaking of the references to Godard's earlier films, there is a direct quotation in *TOUT VA BIEN* of the opening scene in *CONTEMPT*.

A: Yes, that was a mock scene, some kind of parody I wanted to put in. It's exactly the same dialogue, but it is reversed because Jane Fonda says it in a rather ironic way, and then they agree: Well, if we start like that, we are going to make a zombie movie. However the point is not that I wanted to criticize *CONTEMPT*. It's just a way of saying, well, he has said that already, now we are going to say this.

Q: The couple in *TOUT VA BIEN* doesn't seem to be a break with the couples in Godard's earlier films right from *BREATHLESS*, but to be the politically conscious development of the earlier couples.

A: Yes, exactly. Our slogan when doing *TOUT VA BIEN* was that we are going to do the same old thing, but differently. The original title of *TOUT VA BIEN* was “Love Story.” We wanted to do an ironic and joyful film playing with the codes of the normal cinema, and that is why the development of the relationship between Jane Fonda and Yves Montand is so similar to other films. But when it is so much alike there is also the possibility of producing new elements. Maybe the trouble with *TOUT VA BIEN* is that we didn't succeed in doing the same old thing differently, because for the French audience the film is completely different. That's why, maybe, that it is of no use any more to try to deal with the traditional codes at all. We really need to produce films that are breaking points—we need to produce new elements, new visuals, new sounds, and to re-think completely the notion of editing. That's why

Jean-Luc is getting into video. Video is a complete change in the conception of editing, because you edit while you are shooting. He is going to be ten years in advance, because it is a completely non-mastered technique promoted as aesthetics.

Q: In a way it seems similar to the old days, when he wrote the script while shooting the film.

A : Yes, that's where he was really a revolutionary filmmaker. He had no problem with any kind of narrative or any kind of plot starting from one point. All his work is—as Joyce once put it—work in progress. He has never dealt with the problem of content, but with the transformation of form on a certain content. If you want to express a new thing, there is a contradiction in using old aesthetic forms. You need to work in the flesh and blood of the film.

Q: In principle I agree with you, but how do you solve the problem that when you say new things in a new form, then you don't have an audience?

A: It's not true. You have the audience the film can have. I don't think movie theatres are made to be full. They are made to be half empty, or to have 20 people in them at a time. People interested in making political or progressive films are still caught in the old Hollywood notion that films should have large audiences. But we say very clearly in *BRITISH SOUNDS* that a million prints of a Marxist-Leninist film is *GONE WITH THE WIND*. We have been working for ten people with some of the films we have done, but tomorrow those ten people will be 1000 or more. It's part of a historical process, and it's also a matter of taking movies seriously. My next film, which I am going to do alone, will miss at least one-third of the points I want to make, because it is a completely unknown film.

Q: But your choice of Jane Fonda and Yves Montand for *TOUT VA BIEN* —wasn't that an attempt to reach a larger audience? to reach a larger audience?

A: Yes, we needed to do a film like that at the moment, because we were in a kind of ghetto, and we really wanted to go outside. That was both a matter of strategy and economy. And to do a film that would really intervene in the way people look at films, we had to deal with big stars, because stars are the basis of the film phenomenon. But of course we chose stars who were not only stars in the film world, but also stars by the position they had taken in the social and political field. At the same time our choice was determined by our will to go into perhaps the greatest problem we have: to direct actors in a new way, to break with the old Stanislavski system of acting.

Q: The choice of the stars was not forced upon you by the producer?

A: No, we went to Jane and Yves, because we wanted to work with them. We told them about the script and asked if they were willing to do it with

us, and they agreed to do it on a percentage basis. Having the names of Jane, Yves, and Jean-Luc, we were able to get the money for the film.

Q: Was it difficult to work with big stars?

A: Yes, because they were put in a process completely different from the films they had been making before. Jane had been doing *KLUTE* and was going to shoot with Joseph Losey, and in between she was working with us. But it helped a lot that Jane was very interested in the film and also that she came from a school of acting that was completely different from Yves'. There is much more attitude in the American school of acting, while French actors are basically natures, and like Brecht we prefer attitude to nature. We honestly had big problems with the actors, and sometimes the whole thing seemed to get completely out of our hands. That's why Jean-Luc doesn't like actors. He never did, but still the actors he used in his earlier films are the big stars of French cinema today: Belmondo, Piccoli, Anna Karina.

The interesting thing about *TOUT VA BIEN* is that the class struggle is also marked in the differences between the type of acting of the extras and the big stars. The workers in the film are played by people who don't have much experience, and the funny thing is that they discovered a certain tradition of acting that goes very far back in French cinema. They were not at all in the same line. You have a guy who plays like in a Jean Vigo film, and another who plays like in the old Gabin films, and one who plays like Arletty, and they were really enjoying themselves. It was a strange process, getting back to the roots, back to Renoir and the whole tradition of the 30's, which is a political tradition of acting, because it came out of the Popular Front. Maybe the good thing about *TOUT VA BIEN* is the strong feeling you have of both individuality among the workers and at the same time some common will and spirit—individuality and mass consciousness at the same time. The two stars were really frightened in the factory sequence, because the whole thing seemed to get out of their hands. It is very difficult to deal with the problems of the actors when you are trying to produce non-psychological films or films where the psychology is completely different.

Q: But *TOUT VA BIEN* is still a psychological film, isn't it?

A: Yes, but the psychology is produced by the social events in this film. You can't get involved the way you get psychologically involved in other films. It is always a film that pushes you back, and it is a film with directions completely broken at times. You think you are getting once more into some normal process of identification, and then the whole thing explodes. It is not a history, it's a film *on* history.

When you do a film, it's a certain way to play with your own desire; it's the way you project yourself into history. This political projection lies in the form of the film. Politics is not a matter of content, it's a matter of form and expression, and when you are making a film, you are dealing with that. What is a film? Take the phenomenon of editing. Editing is



exactly the process through which you disconnect a certain reality in order to reconnect it in another way. If you don't break completely with the notion that in films you have to produce realistic effects, then you get nowhere. There is a non-realistic way to be more realistic, and that is exactly what we are into.

Jean-Luc is obviously the first one to have made sound movies. There is the matter of the sound track in his films, and we need to go deeper into that. It is a basic problem to be able to hear the social music we are involved in. People say that our films lack music. Well, to me films like *STRUGGLES IN ITALY* and *TOUT VA BIEN* are highly musical films. I think we need more music and poetry in cinema, but when I say poetry, I am really referring to people who are struggling inside the language, and this is both an aesthetic and a political struggle. Everyone criticizes us for making the films we do. They consider them non-political. They also say that they are not even films, just like people said that Joyce's novels were not novels.

Q: Usually films are defined as a means of mass communication, while you, as far as I can understand, consider a film to be just a film. But what will the social and political effect of your work be?

A: If you don't start from reality, if you don't start from the fact that a film is a film, then you are not going to produce any positive effects by the diffusion of your film in the social structure. You need to know that you are specific, and you need to deal with the aesthetic problems, because they are specific for the filmmaker. What the social effect of your film will be depends on your situation in the social structure, on your position in production, and on the way you try to fight a system that strangles you. If you do not have profound personal reasons to rebel against the system, you will achieve nothing.

The process of making a film is a process where you say:

“Well, I am surrounded by thousands of images and sounds. In the streets of Paris there is a normal code of sounds, and I know what that normality means and what effect it has on me. It is an effect of madness.”

So try to work on that as a filmmaker. Try to disconnect the elements of that reality and to reconnect them in another way.

You need to reach the point where you are not speaking as an ego, but where something is speaking through you. This is a process of complete dissolution of the ego. Something is speaking through me which is history, not only my own history, but centuries of history. It is some kind of really schizophrenic experience, and that's what I am going to work at in my next film. Sometimes the heavy Marxist talk, the stiff political thinking, is only a way to preserve one's individuality and attempt to master reality. Let's instead try to break the individuality and have reality speaking through you. That's exactly the point where you break the whole mystique of the auteur.

If you take films like *WIND FROM THE EAST* and *STRUGGLES IN ITALY*, they are reflections on the streams we were really affected by, which is the class struggle in France. There is a delirium of history in those films. We need to have in our western society a kind of speech which will really explain and intervene in the reality we are facing, which is the reality of imperialism. And imperialism is the reality that one country lives from the exploitation of the world outside it. European thinking is completely closed in itself. When we look at ourselves in mirrors, it's really the perfect image of our will to enclose ourselves. It is our attempt to negate the fact that we are living in the state of imperialism. We are the civilization of mirrors; we are looking at our faces all the time, and that is a very European phenomenon. In China mirrors were only for dragons, because they said that the monster would be afraid to see his own face. We are monsters, knowing perfectly well that our white skin means death for the people we are oppressing.

Take what happened in China and its effect on us: it is like the opening of a crack. We are facing a continent which is really linking and mixing elements of Marxism into the reality and thinking of very ancient China. We also have to dig into the centuries of our culture instead of re-assuring ourselves in the name of Marxism and through Marxism trying to recuperate the voice of God, which has a total knowledge of history. The total knowledge is God, but we don't have any total knowledge. Today there is an urgent need for what people call politics, and which is, more generally, history. People rush to history books instead of fiction where history is written in a way so that the currency of our presence can be recuperated.

Q: Looking at Godard's older films, they are, of course, political right from the first sequence in the first film, where the gangster shoots the policeman. But probably they are political in an almost subconscious way, without Godard really knowing it, don't you think?

A: It's not a problem of conscious or unconscious—that's what they are. And if you think our subconsciousness is not working in *STRUGGLES IN ITALY*, you're wrong. It's working in a more effective way than in his previous films. *PIERROT LE FOU* had a very traditional narrative that could be understood by everybody, but go to a film like *STRUGGLES IN ITALY*, and you'll be really puzzled. You think it is a very self-conscious film, but it isn't. When you meet someone who has not had the opportunity or possibility to express himself as an individual, but who tries to build his own language through a trip into theory, when you meet someone who is cut from the roots of his own language, then the politically subconscious operates at a level you can't imagine.

There is no such film where only the subconsciousness plays, and no such film where only the self-consciousness plays. When you are making a film, something is speaking through you. This something is not an individual inner landscape, but a group phantasma or historical phantasma. People like Rimbaud and Artaud can only be understood if you see them as completely saturated with history, and the same goes

for Jean-Luc. When you make a film you don't make it alone. You make it because you belong to a certain historical tradition. And Jean-Luc has obviously made a revolution the way he has appeared as an auteur. He is a very strange kind of auteur because he has never produced any personal type of speech. As an editor he has mainly worked on disconnections of the historical background. So Jean-Luc is not doing the films. The films of Jean-Luc are done through someone—who happens to be Jean-Luc. He places himself in the position of a loudspeaker.

Q: You attempted to do an historical film on the Palestinian situation. What happened with the film?

A: We've had this film on our backs for two years, and it has passed through four or five stages of cutting. One of the interesting things about the film is our impossibility to edit it, but I think we've found some kind of creative possibility to reflect on the impossibility of editing the material. We plan to make four or five films each lasting one and one-half hours out of the ten hours of material we have. They will be struggling films in the sense that we will honestly speak about the problems we have been facing in trying to film an historical process.

Q: So these films will really be about the impossibility of finishing the film

A: ... which is a possibility to finish the film, yes. It will be a break with the normal militant film made on foreign conflicts. For various historic reasons, the Palestine problem contains a lot of crossroads. What is Palestine if not the effect of the fall of the old British and French imperialism and the taking over by the new head of imperialism, the USA? What is Palestine if you don't go back to Czarist Russia and to Germany in between the World Wars? And what is Palestine if you don't go back into Arab history, which is completely unknown? Palestine is a basic problem of the days we are facing, and I think it is more interesting to see how these basic problems go back into our own lives here and now. It's more interesting to try and make some experiments on the material we have been filming than to make a film that pretends to sum up in one continuity the incredible aspects of the problem.

Q: Does this mean that basically you find it impossible to make an historical film?

A: I find it very difficult. Another aspect is that I am afraid by the kind of success I could achieve by doing such a film. I am very cautious about the fact that referring to the theory of history, which is Marxism, I could deliver some kind of analysis, which will be quoted as a partial possibility to deal with history and which could be integrated in the way people normally see history. Maybe a Marxist film on history is possible, but I doubt it facing the problems we have been facing. I don't doubt that some kind of analysis could be produced, but I doubt that this analysis can transform itself into the form of a film. The problem, again, is not to do a Marxist film on history, but to do an historical film in a

Marxist way. It's obvious that we completely refuse the easy prestige of the reportage movie. We don't make a film where we can put a voice-over that would be God's voice capturing all the aspects of a moving reality. We want to do something far more complex, which will produce a new kind of aesthetic and political approach to the problem.

Any film is political. Any film stands consciously or unconsciously for something, so the problem is: what kind of politics is working within a film? In a film, politics expresses itself in aesthetics, because a film is a matter of transforming a certain content into a certain form. Brecht has said:

"I am posing myself the problem of form, because I am posing myself problems of politics."

What we are facing today is that the word "politics" is getting a wider sense each day. That explains the position we have taken toward so-called "political films," which we define as "films on politics." That means films where you have characters who, among other activities, also have political activities. This is the way the ruling class defines politics. And people are through with politics in that sense, which in the world we are living in is a highly political statement. Depending on the activity people have in the social structure, this can sometimes be very reactionary. But we also have examples that this way of refusing the coded politics of the ruling class has a revolutionary meaning and effect, and here comes the problems of aesthetics and of new cultural forms. That's why we are not making films for a large audience, which is the Hollywood ideology. We don't believe that a film tells anything. A film is the telling. At a certain point in the film the transformation that you are focusing on should transform the film. Film history is full of films on madness, films on love, films on politics. But there is a considerable lack of mad films, love films, political films—where the subject of the film is being transformed into the flesh and blood of the film.

Take schizophrenic people: they are haunted by history, and so were Artaud and Bataille. They are driving back history on their own bodies. They are always in the process of tattooing history on their white skin, and when we make a film, the screen is only a white skin to tattoo. Schizophrenic people can travel through centuries, and what have we been doing in films like *WIND FROM THE EAST* and *STRUGGLES IN ITALY*? They are the perfect image of what was the militancy at that time, that incredible drive of madness which was inside it. They are affected by history, not on a theoretical level, but in the flesh and blood of the films. It's a kind of experiment, where you reach yourself, and not as an ego, but as an incredible amount of mutual energy. Let's just call it a poetic vision. But people who have built the theory of history were dealing with the same kind of poetry. You can't understand Marx if you don't see that this guy describing the capitalist machine was jerking off all the time. He loved putting all the elements together, and it's very important to love what you're doing.

Many political people have self-conscious and proclaimed interests that

they call revolutionary. But they also have unconscious interests that can be completely reactionary, even if they are linked to the revolutionary interests. There comes the point when I say:

“Man, blow your mind, try to dig into your own unconscious, try to find where your investment and your interest is.”

We are in a mad structure cut away from our roots by some cold monster which is ruling class ideology. We have to break with our own individualities and to stop referring to the working class as an abstraction. Our search must be for concrete bodies here and now. Che was right when saying that a true revolutionary has in himself a great feeling of love, and I am not being metaphysical saying that. I am being really materialistic. There is a point where in a certain state of mind the spirit gets back the overwhelming experience of matter. Then you are at a point where there is no such thing as good and bad, despair, and joy. You're beyond those contradictions, and everything is complete and total experience. In revolutionary moments, that's what the masses are looking for. May 68 was a very total experience. People were talking and dancing in the streets and doing all sorts of crazy things. When you have passed through that, you want it to happen again and again.

McLuhan was basically wrong when he talked about the death of Gutenberg. In spite of the civilization of images and sounds, people don't see films, they read them, because they are marked by books. It's not by chance that we lack completely the sense of seeing. It's an historical phenomenon of imperialist society. If you take ancient culture in Mexico, you see that the relation between the medicine man and the young guy he is going to initiate is a complete reversal of the traditional relationship we have between a teacher and a pupil. It's basically a risky relationship, and the medicine man is not delivering his knowledge—he is delivering the knowledge was delivered to him. The relationship is based on experience and not on literary knowledge. You see it in the wonderful books by Carlos Castañeda about the teaching of Don Juan. They are the first books to contain a basic criticism of our occidental way of reasoning.

Sometimes I feel more like a very old Indian, and would like to speak Mexican. Marxism doesn't help me to live, and I don't want to call myself a Marxist. I'll leave that to people who are satisfied by calling themselves Marxists. You can be a teacher of Marxism. They don't bother anybody. They are just over there teaching, but where is life?

### Cine Manifest: a self-history

by Eugene Corr and Peter Gessner

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Cine Manifest is a collective of nine professional filmmakers/ workers living and working in San Francisco. When asked by JUMP CUT to do an article about ourselves, we were anxious to share the experience of our two-year existence with the rest of the film community and at the same time a little apprehensive about the problems of a group writing about itself. Somehow such efforts tend to reach a level of inspiration wedged somewhere between a travel film narration and an IRS audit notice. There is a tendency to write from behind the safe and faceless anonymity of the collective “we,” like a crippled halfback approaching the line behind Leo Nomellini. Instead of tiptoeing around every chuckhole of form, we decided to plunge ahead with a loose narrative of our experience as a group.

Cine Manifest came together in 1972 around a common goal—to make political, dramatic feature films—and a common conviction that a collective style of work was the best way to reach that goal. Politically, our perspective is Left, broadly defined. The politics of individuals span a range within that perspective, and this is reflected in the three fiction scripts we have written.

We are nine men and women with diverse film backgrounds. As freelancers in documentaries, independent features, network and educational news and public affairs, most of us had been involved in considerable day-to-day filmmaking. At the most extreme, our backgrounds include the opposite poles of U.S. cinema: Hollywood and American Zoetrope (Francis Coppola’s San Francisco production company) on one end, and American Documentary Films and Newsreel on the other. These poles, of course, are not nearly as neat in reality as they appear in print. For instance, the creator of *SONS AND DAUGHTERS*, an early anti-war documentary, is also a CBS cameraman. Nonetheless, the “two poles” view, straddling and mini-poles notwithstanding, is a useful way to look at us.

A common intersect was frustration, political and personal. Among those who concentrated on political documentaries, such as *FINALLY*

GOT THE NEWS (about insurgent black auto workers in Detroit), TIME OF THE LOCUST (another early antiwar film), and the previously mentioned SONS AND DAUGHTERS, there was a growing disaffection with the documentary form. Accompanying an aesthetic impatience with the limits of the form itself, there was also concern about distribution, meaning not simply *how many* saw the film, but *who*. On the other hand, those who worked in and around Hollywood during the late 60s, a time of apparent receptivity to counter-cultural film themes, found themselves increasingly frustrated and alienated by that experience. Working in an industry that opportunistically attempted to create an image of hipness and concern, while in reality remaining the quintessence of political perversity, created strong pressures for an alternative.

These are some of the diverse forces that pulled us together. This diversity helped provide a basic shape for our evolving aesthetic. It led us to a conception of feature films that meant a fusion of social content with mass form. "Political" films did not have to be the province of a Spartan elite on the one hand, nor did Popular Cinema have to remain dissociated from the U.S. social experience.

We are not interested in making films that speak only to the already converted; we want to reach as broad an audience as possible. We won't conceded popular films to Hollywood. This runs counter to a strong contemporary trend in left filmmaking, Hollywood contemporary trend in left filmmaking, typified by Godard's recent efforts, that we believe is essentially elitist and esoteric. We are suspicious of attempts to create "socialism in one movie," doubt that we will "transcend bourgeois forms," and even question the value many attach to the attempt. Somewhere between the tedious purity of form and content of LETTER TO JANE and the manipulative melodrama and mindless content of BILLY JACK, there is a space for a cinema emphasizing realistic character and milieu.

As a function of this commitment to audience, we have chosen traditional dramatic and story forms for our scripts. We have opted for a realism that imbeds its characters in the contemporary U.S. social and political reality. Rather than reinforce the emotional and intellectual detachment that Godard-Gorin argue for, we want to help create a feeling of connectedness. In the vacuum of U.S. social alienation, the last thing we need is a cinema that reaffirms that alienation. At the same time, we want to avoid the Hollywood tradition of the romantic superhero and escapist fantasy, and a potentially crippling characteristic of political films—the lack of genuine characterization, prescribing human behavior without both bothering to observe it.

Brief summaries of our scripts can perhaps make this discussion more concrete:

QUINT'S LAST CASE by Steve Wax and Burns Ellison is an extension of the traditional detective story form and deals with Watergate's seamy lessons and Joe McCarthy's legacy. Set in the hearing rooms of

Washington and California's depressed aerospace industry, the film interweaves a story of moral and political corruption in a landscape of roller-rinks, golf courses and jerry-built shopping centers.

OVER-UNDER by Gene Corr and Peter Gessner is a dramatic look at the life of a young factory worker-semi-pro baseball player. The script details the tensions of his marriage and the numbing repetitiveness of his work, his attempts at escape into the bus-and-one-night hotel world of semi-pro baseball, his confrontation with a black-led wildcat strike, and his final coming to terms with himself as a man.

JAMMING by Robin Nilsson is the story of a young artist, formerly politically active, who now paints by day and drives a cab at night. The script is a record of his personal and political growth as he attempts to place himself and his art in the world he sees each night from the driver's seat. Surly drunks, little old ladies, lonely cranks, and everyday people pass through his cab, as a crime wave against cabbies forces him to make some hard choices about the priorities of his life.

The evolution of the scripts, from their early beginnings until today—when we are ready to begin fundraising and make them a reality—was an ongoing process of individual and collective input and criticism. It was essentially an organic, evolving, and sometimes chaotic process. Criticism usually *follows* the creative process, after the fact. We tried to integrate the critical process with the creative one. This process did not eliminate conflict. Rather, as the collective became better critics and the writers became better and less defensive writers, the conflict became more intense and ultimately more productive. We intend to apply this creative/ critical integration to the shooting process itself.

Producing and mounting independent features in the United States outside the traditional systems of financial support is an enormous undertaking. We have to deal with our own economic survival to ensure our existence as a group. We have continued to earn money by working as cameramen, grips, gaffers, editors, and writers in the local film industry. Our credits have included writing, directing or producing educational and short films, working on commercial low budget features and TV pilots, and making some public interest spots on amnesty, political prisoners, nuclear power, and the energy "crisis." One member spent the last several months camped outside the Hearst mansion, working as a CBS cameraman.

Some of our economic base comes from crew work on TV commercials. Now, it is clearly a contradiction for a political collective to make its living working on ads for Bayer Aspirin, Honda motorcycles, and a new brand of "organic" potato chips called Prontos (which we decided sounded more like a desensitizing gel for males who prematurely ejaculate: no one can divine the psychology of Madison Avenue, although their *motive* is as clear as a mugger's). We don't enjoy our role as small-time complicators in the manipulation of people's minds. But we have to eat, and in some cases it does help build our film skills.



Recently, our dissatisfaction with this type of day work has escalated. We hope to start making short sponsored films for progressive groups like unions and health care programs. Although we will never probably be able to cut loose commercial work entirely, we hope to be doing more documentaries that we don't have to apologize for, while continuing to move ahead on our features.

Unlike certain "Movement" filmmakers who mysteriously appear to live on nothing and magically continue to make films, we *have* to work. We see ourselves as film workers and we relate to our concrete industry situation. The group's original nucleus came together around the formation of an independent trade union which later merged with NABET Local 532. We continue to remain active in the new union, and one of our members is currently working with a radical caucus within the more traditional IATSE local here.

More interesting than how we earn our money is what we do with it after we get it. All income is shared and goes into a collective pot. Out of this we pay for our building, the filmmaking equipment we are accumulating (grip truck, editing facilities, lighting and camera gear, etc.), and for the support of ourselves and our dependents. Our subsistence salaries are based on need rather than skill category or who earned the most. The collective income sharing plan has been functioning successfully for almost two years. It has also brought us a certain amount of time and space to undertake various activities, such as establishing a Film Acting Workshop, where we test out ideas from the scripts and learn to work with actors and non-actors.

Beyond dealing with our own survival and generating our feature scripts, we are attempting to deal with the options facing U.S. filmmakers in the social context of 1974. Our collective work style has exposed for us conflicting views of the role of the artist—roughly outlined as the individual, autonomous creator vs. the artist working in some social context. Most contemporary artists and filmmakers particularly stress the artist's independence and the necessity of keeping his/her vision intact. (If your "social context" is Hollywood, this is not an entirely unreasonable view.) Even among many of those who would consider themselves revolutionary artists, the prevailing consciousness and predominant work style is individual. We feel it is essential to reject the notion of the autonomous artist, separate from community.

Mao, in the *Yenan Forum on Art and Literature* outlined metaphorically some possible roles and levels of involvement for the artist: to ride through a meadow on horseback and look at the flowers; to dismount and walk among the flowers for a while; or to dismount and go among the flowers and remain there.

One need only look at the power of *OPEN CITY*, a film which grew directly out of the mass struggle against Nazism, to grasp the kind of political art that is possible when the artist is in the metaphorical flower bed. From the standpoint of political art, the proper and most productive role for the artist is to participate in, and create from, the

social struggle.

Obviously, we have a problem. We're not living in Italy during the antifascist struggles, nor in China during the struggle against the Japanese and the Kuomintang. We're in 1974 United States. Wishful thinking and empty rhetoric aside, there is no current mass movement or focal point of resistance. The general level of political activity is sporadic. We (Cine Manifest) are white, and that separates us from real access to what struggles are occurring in the Third World communities.

What is the role of the progressive filmmaker in the social context of the United States in 1974? We've posed a question that we must ask but aren't able to answer. In fact, the only thing certain about the question of role is that it won't be defined by progressive filmmakers themselves. The artist's role will only be defined through the broader and more intense social struggle. And since artists don't *create* social movements, the question is not of any real consequence until a broad and strong movement for social change exists.

This is not a justification for the artist to sit back, groveling in impotence and railing at history for placing us in such uncertain, cynical times. Rather, it can be seen as a perspective for viewing the artist's work. The U.S. social reality is potentially explosive. We are experiencing a crisis of government and a crisis in the economy. Both provide fertile ground for the imagination of the political artist.

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[To top](#)   [Current issue](#)   [Archived essays](#)   [Jump Cut home](#)

### Popcorn Venus Analyzing the fantasy

by E. Ann Kaplan

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Marjorie Rosen, *POPCORN VENUS: WOMEN, MOVIES, & THE AMERICAN DREAM*. New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973. 416 pp., \$9.95.

Marjorie Rosen's book is one of three recently published works on women in film.(1) All three are important in terms of breaking new ground and opening up a previously neglected perspective on film. Earlier studies of women in film were written by men and totally lacked a feminist perspective. The emphasis was either on sex (e.g., Alexander Walker's *Sex in the Movies*) or on stars (e.g., Edgar Morin's *The Stars*). (2) While the focus was workable, the authors were not sensitive to the implications of the images of women. Nearly all books on film have been written by men, and film criticism, like other areas of study, has been heavily male oriented.(3)

It was, then, high time that women involved film began to look at films from a feminist point of view. Already in 1970, women in other fields were running courses on women's issues and writing about their research. Presumably because so few women are teaching film in universities, work on women in film was left mainly to the critics. Molly Haskell began to include a feminist perspective in some of her reviews, and other women began considering the female role in analyzing films. (4) But there was no sustained, scholarly work in the area as was being started in literature, history, psychology, etc.

Rosen's book is a first step in the right direction. She has done the basic spade work for future studies. She has slogged through endless reels of film from the 1900s to the present, carefully documenting significant and insignificant films from all periods. Her index lists hundreds of titles, and there is also an impressive bibliography about women, including articles from popular magazines and newspapers relevant to film images or to the position of women in society at various times. She manages to give a brief description of each film's plot, and to capture in

succinct phrases the essence of its style, tone, and attitude toward women. Her descriptions of individual stars are particularly vivid. Here, for example, is how she portrays Theda Bara:

“With her waist-length black hair, her darkly kohled eyes and crude exotic make-up, Theda Bara embodied still primitive notions of depravity and wanton lust. She postured triumphantly as the poor male on whom she drew a bead was driven to drink, ruin, slavery ...” (5)

Mary Pickford’s contrasting eternal-little-girl image is captured in one sentence:

“With her thick golden curls, her cherubic body and pretty face, she was, from the beginning, the incarnation of angelic sweetness and childlike innocence” (37).

Much further on, Audrey Hepburn’s ambivalent image is presented equally vividly:

“Hepburn simply out-dazzled by the sheer force of her piquant joie de vivre and the apposite way she was put together. Perhaps it was the unusual combination of a narrow, bony body which she carried like a queen and an elfin face whose doe eyes contradicted by the strength of intelligence in the look, the irregular nose and wide mouth whose smile was at once sensuous, mischievous and absolutely sincere.” (285)

Rosen’s lively style is ultimately responsible for the ease with which the book moves along. Her wit, irony and humor keep the reader interested. There is information about stars’ lives, their relationships with directors, their attitudes to their careers. Often, a well chosen quotation expresses more than a page of prose could have done. For example, Zanuck’s influence on the kind of sex in Twentieth Century films is conveyed in two apt quotations about his own sex life.(6) The text throughout is punctuated with thoughtfully chosen remarks by stars, directors, and producers, and with quotations from popular magazines about what women are or should be.(7)

Rosen’s main principle of organization is ultimately simply chronological. After an opening section dealing with Victorian sensibility and the early days of film, Rosen proceeds to divide the book into sections covering each decade from the Twenties to the Sixties and Seventies. She manages to find quite distinct images from decade to decade, although of course in some periods there are contradictory images, reflecting a society in transition or a crisis producing the need for certain fantasies. Rosen attempts to account for the changes in female images in terms of women’s place in society at any one time. Her success at this is uneven. For some reason, her focus is more political in the early sections and more sexual towards the end. At times, her theme seems to be the changing image of women as sexual objects, while at

other times she stresses the relation between strides women have made politically and socially, and the images in films. The best sections for me are those on the Thirties and on the Sixties and Seventies, although the focus in each is quite different.

In the section on the Thirties, Rosen shows well the discrepancy between the images of women on the screen and the reality of their lives off screen. On screen, women were shown succeeding through wit in a series of comedies and gutsy dramas where they played “detectives, spies, con artists, private secretaries, molls, and especially reporters and editors” (134). But, Rosen says, this was a

“distortion of the truth of women’s social role. In the name of escapism, films were guilty of extravagant misrepresentations, exuding a sense of well-being to the nation in general and women in particular. In fact, precisely the opposite was true” (134).

And Rosen goes on to document employment figures revealing the backlash against what women had achieved in the Twenties. Paradoxically, of course, the image of women was comparatively strong in the Thirties, but Rosen suggests,

“Perhaps because the Depression was treating its women so cruelly, the screen could afford to offer comfort in some small way” (138).

But sexism was still evident alongside the independent surface women were allowed to have. The ultimate motivation for daring actions and confrontations had to be loyalty to the male master. All in all, Rosen concludes that Thirties movies “by refusing to show existing conditions ..., packaged a lie insulating females from the facts of their social and economic undermining” (146).

This last statement is crucial. Unfortunately, this, and many other similar comments in the book, are not followed up by exploration and analysis of *why* Hollywood producers did not show existing conditions, or of *why* sexism in film continued in one form or another from decade to decade. Her insights remain undeveloped and are so unobtrusively stated that hasty readers could pass them over. Rosen so excels at vivid portrayals of stars and directors, and at descriptions of films themselves that these catch our attention and remain in our mind. Since the critical and analytical statements are not made the center of most of the discussion and are not fully explored, they fade into the background.

The same kind of thing happens in section six on the Sixties and Seventies, which is also a good study. The focus here is on the new sexuality and morality of the era as it is expressed in films. Rosen has good points. She notes the connection between sex and violence, and its link with the growth of female autonomy. She notes the growing images of androgyny and grotesques. She sees that, for some reason, European filmmakers present women more fully and attempt to explore their problems as if they were human beings rather than the cardboard

stereotypes that still predominate in U.S. films. She is good on the new Law-and-Order breed of heroes in recent U.S. films, from which women have been exorcised. But all these points are made in the form of questions, and again are left unexplored. For instance, Rosen ends a chapter with this interesting thought:

“If the sexual cornucopia released in the sixties has truly contributed to our alienation and impotence, if our emotions live in vacuums and our libidos can only be resuscitated through violence, pornography, or freaky sex, what’s left? Is there any hope for intimacy in movies? In life?” (343).

Rosen’s insight is correct and important, but it’s necessary to go on and show *why* at this historical moment in a highly developed, technological society, our social relations are in such a pathetic state. Obviously, the state of affairs has everything to do with the kind of system we live. It’s a system that virtually thrives on people’s alienation from their work, from their community, from their social/ professional group, from their families and from themselves.

Again, Rosen raises pertinent questions about the differences between European female images and U.S. ones. She asks,

“Why, generally, do European actresses present multiple-dimensioned personalities while our American stars flatten out like un-corrugated cardboard? Isn’t American society more flexible in allowing women alternatives to traditional role playing and life styles? How does one account for the discrepancies in cultural associations, myths, and movie images?” (352).

But again, there is no attempt to answer the crucial questions she raises. She allows herself simply to observe that Americans “caricature screen heroines”, and passes on to examples of European images.

Style almost compensates for the lack of any sustained theoretical underpinning within which Rosen might have placed the discoveries that she has made. For Rosen does express a clear attitude to what she is discussing through her tone, her use of language and sentence structure. Much of the prose contains disjointed phrases, incomplete sentences, exclamations, or asides that say more than might be possible in a well reasoned way. For example, the following passage captures the typical U.S. female image neatly:

“We overplay. Overdress. A floozy dress or tight pants tell the whole story. Or a platinum wig. Or spectacles or cleavage. Our women slide into easy character niches (tomboy Debbie, volatile Liz, kooky Liza)” (352).

We are constantly aware of an alert, perceptive, judging intelligence behind the material, keenly aware of the trivial nature of the commercial films under discussion, of the obvious and nearly ridiculous sexism at

work, of male directors' pathetic needs to undercut women through the decades. Rosen is at her best when capturing the nuances of sensibilities underlying women's depiction in films. She understands how the mass media works, and she is sensitive to the impact of images propagated through film, women's magazines and television. She can sense an era's tone and mood, and is thus able to show what women were responding to at any one time, while knowing enough about women's reality to see the needs being exploited. The book's last sections are perhaps the best because here Rosen could rely on her own experiences growing up in the Fifties and living in the Sixties and Seventies. In earlier sections she obviously had to rely on available documents and imagine the rest for herself. Nevertheless, even there she manages to sense what probably were the dominant trends of fashion, morality, and style, and to see how the movies expressed the era's consciousness or how directors used trends for their own profit.

However, since Rosen is in fact dealing mainly with the commercial entertainment film, it would have been logical to address the vexed question of the relation between mass culture, commercial art, and ideology. The questions she raises approach these issues, but one does not have the sense that she is totally aware of the implications of her insights.

For example, in the preface Rosen asks rhetorically whether art reflects life or life art? She answers both questions affirmatively, because in the first case

“films have been a mirror held up to society's porous face. They therefore reflect the changing societal image of women—which, until recently, has not been taken seriously enough.”

But life also reflects art

“because of the magnetism of the movies—because their glamour and intensity and ‘entertainment’ are so distracting and seemingly innocuous—women accept their morality or values” (13).

But Rosen does not go on to explore the extremely complicated nature of this vicious cycle, or begin to analyze the function mass entertainment serves in our system. The opening chapters show that Rosen sees film as a powerful escapist form for the mass of people in the United States. But typically she *arrives* at crucial questions in the course of discussion instead of starting out with the questions and aiming to *answer* them. In chapter 2, Rosen states that women were in urgent need of escape and “brought to early picture shows their empty lives, waiting to be filled by any distraction” (25). She then notes that movies had a much greater impact on audiences than the stage had, and proceeds to ask,

“Why, if art is so directly reflective and thus familiar, is it in this medium so powerful? Which is strongest—the reality out

of which the illusion is created, the celluloid illusion itself, or the need for illusion? Do we hold the mirror up and dive in? And if we do, what are the consequences? And what are the responsibilities of the illusion makers?" (26).

These are all vital questions, but Rosen leaves them hanging there while she returns to her chronological sequence, detailing reactions to the first movies.

In chapter 22, Rosen returns to the questions about popular culture and life to which she seems genuinely interested in finding an answer, but perhaps did not know where to research. (Her bibliography conspicuously lacks references to people who have written about mass culture and society, e. g., from England, Denys Thompson, Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, Hall and Whannel; or in the United States, Paul Lazarfeldt, Bernard Rosenberg, David Manning White, Nicholas Johnson, Diana Trilling.) She again asks:

"Is life reflecting 'art' ? Or 'art' life? Feeding each other, inextricably intertwined, our mores are changing so rapidly that we can hardly fix where one begins and the other leaves off" (333).

But the comment is a separate paragraph, and remains an isolated thought within the main discussion, rather than becoming *the topic* under consideration.

I am not suggesting that Marjorie Rosen should have written a different book. I am truly grateful for the one we have. I consider it a major piece of work in terms of laying out what exists and pointing the way to the central issues that need exploration. Rosen understands clearly in her last chapter that women now must undertake the challenge of "utilizing feminine resources" and "reinterpreting the American Dream." (8) Women have, of course, already begun to respond to the challenge and are making films both reflecting and building toward a new consciousness. But much more work needs to be done on detailing our history in film and understanding the function that history served in terms of internalizing male ways of seeing us, and in broader terms of the kind of system we live in.

Sexism is an essential part of capitalism (that is not, of course, to say that sexism does not exist under other systems), and we need to understand how it functions within our system if we are to combat it effectively. A study of women in film is an excellent way to focus on connections between sexism and U.S. ideology as reflected in the commercial film. Without fully intending to, Marjorie Rosen has in fact given us a wealth of material about how sexism works in popular culture. Women critics now have the responsibility of exploring the issues she raises in depth. As feminists undertaking serious film study, we will also have to develop a critical methodology appropriate for our perspective. Or at the very least, be aware of the methodological questions that our approach raises. With the three books on women in



film solidly behind us, we should be able to evaluate limitations of the approaches and develop ones that would lead us deeper into the way sexism functions in art and in our society.

**Notes:**

1. The others are Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* and Joan Mellen, *Women and Their Sexuality in the New Film*.

2. See also: Stark Young on "Greta Garbo" in *American Film Criticism: From the Beginnings to Citizen Kane*, ed. Stanley Kauffmann with Bruce Henstell (N.Y., 1972); Parker Tyler, *Sex Psyche Etcetera in the Film* (esp. "The Awful Fate of the Sex Goddess" ) (N.Y., 1969); I. and E. Cameron, *Dames* (N.Y., 1969)

3. Film seems to have been more heavily male dominated than any other of the liberal arts fields. This must be partly due to the technological aspects of the form, but the entire Hollywood production scene, with its hierarchical arrangement and elitism was especially chauvinistic. Until recently, it was rare to find a female director (cf. Rosen's "Epilogue," ) and in criticism there are no major works by women (Lotte Eisner comes closest, and she, of course, is from Europe).

4. For example, Molly Haskell, "The Cinema of Howard Hawks," *Intellectual Digest*, April, 1972, 56-58; Joyce Rheuben, "Joseph Von Sternberg: Scientist Versus Vamp," *Sight and Sound*, Winter, 1972-73. Sandra Shevey early on had a short feminist review of current films in the *New York Times*, May 24, 1970, 2:13. Outside of the established national media, feminist film criticism appeared in the underground press and the feminist press from about 1969 on, and the first issue of *Women and Film* was published in early 1972.

5. *Popcorn Venus*, p. 60, All further quotes from Rosen's book will be indicated by page numbers following the quote.

6. See pp. 269-270. Especially revealing is Genevieve Gilles' comment:

"He is so intelligent, but he is like a child. He is in his car with a chauffeur and we'll pass a girl and he will say, 'Look at that!' Onassis is like that, too. Darryl has a book with all the girls' names in it, and if he likes one, he puts stars next to her name. Four stars! Five stars!"

7. See the exchange between Louis B. Meyer and Stroheim, pp. 68-69; Griffith's romantic speech on love, pp. 57-58; selections from 1920's *Photoplay* on Women's Colleges and on what makes women attractive to men, pp. 80-81; the attitudes Mayer and Thalberg had toward women, pp. 144-145; Dr. Maxwell Maltz's prescriptions for beauty in the *Literary Digest* in 1936, p. 181, etc.

8. Rosen's book was, of course, written before the new women's films

had been made. It badly needs a revised final chapter to deal adequately with what women have been doing in the past two years. A film like Nelly Kaplan's A VERY CURIOUS GIRL needs discussing, as well as work by new young filmmakers like Joyce Chopra, Julia Reichert, Sheila Paige, Ariel Dougherty, and Mary Feldhaus Weber. Rosen's "Epilogue" on female directors and script writers might have been expanded to deal with the contemporary U.S. and European scene.

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[To top](#)   [Current issue](#)   [Archived essays](#)   [Jump Cut home](#)

### Festival Report Animation at Zagreb

by O.W. Riegel

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These are troubled and faltering times for the art of animation, judging by the screenings at the Second World Animated Film Festival at Zagreb.<sup>(1)</sup>

It may so seem, perhaps, because one comes to a world showcase of animation with exaggerated expectations for the most international of all the cinematic arts, the freest from the restraints and limitations of photographed reality. It's the medium which, at least in theory, offers the greatest liberty for innovative ideas, surreal insights and emotions, and generally, free play for the soaring imagination. It must be reported, with regret, that there were few new ideas at Zagreb, no special esthetic or political causes to advance, no special novelties in technique or intent, no rage, little emotion, and not much soaring. The impression overall was of *déjà vu*.

Yet at the same time the festival was impressive and instructive. Unless the selection committee overlooked more incisive material than we were shown, which I doubt, I do not mean to denigrate the Zagreb accomplishment. The festival was superbly organized under the leadership of Zelimar Matko, Commercial Director of Zagreb Film. About 200 films were screened, including 103 from 22 countries selected for competition out of 364 films submitted from 27 countries. The films could not have been more elegantly mounted, in the new 2,000 seat Lisinski Concert Hall with its cubistic walls of native wood, huge screen, and wide encircling foyers illuminated by balloonlike chandeliers of glittering crystal. Many of the films were skillful and stylish, most were well-intentioned, and some were very funny. What was lacking was challenge and fire.

For example, the international jury gave the Grand Prix to *DIARY*, impressions of a visit to New York City by Nedeljko Dragić, one of Zagreb's most talented animators, and an obvious choice in view of the competition. The drawing is up to the Dragić standard, which means that it is a pleasure to see, but I find neither new insights nor novelties

of emotional reaction or point of view in Dragić's impressions. The runner-up for the Grand Prix, awarded first place in the longer-than-3-minutes category, was another Zagreb film, **SECOND CLASS PASSENGER**, by Borivoj Dovniković. In a series of sight gags and the incomprehensible gobble-de-gook language that is a hallmark of the Zagreb style, the film relates the tribulations of a train rider whose compartment is invaded by a succession of interlopers ranging from dogs to creatures from outer space. Most of it is hilarious, but it is hardly a classic of the art of animation.

An interesting "first film," which won the award in that category, was **THE LONG DRAWN-OUT TRIP**, a mordant satire on U.S. civilization, Los Angeles locus, by Gerald Scarfe, the English artist and cartoonist whose grotesquely far-out caricatures are a regular feature of the London *Sunday Times*. Both Scarfe's film and **DIARY** show the suitability of the medium of animated film for the quick, lively, satiric commentary on contemporary milieus and institutions. It's like having topical kinetic portfolios by a Daumier, Searle, or Steinberg. One can imagine a welcome expansion of this genre, with quickly and relatively cheaply produced exposes and cutting commentaries on the current human condition and the follies and disasters of our time, ecological, political and other, in a happy conjunction of function with an ideal medium.

I am aware, however, that this wishful concept is not very realistic. Films need audiences. With the fading of the short subject from commercial theaters, and the coolness of television to uncouth graphics and contemporary criticism with a sharp cutting edge, it is difficult to see where audiences could be found. In regard to production cost, by using a dissolve technique, Scarfe reduced the number of separate drawings to six per second instead of the usual twelve. Nevertheless it took him six weeks of hard work to transfer his impressions of Los Angeles to 70 mm film stock. The double meaning of "long drawn out trip" is the immense drawing chore involved in making such a film even with the shortcut.

Another difficulty with this kind of topical film is that there simply may not be a supply of first-class artists capable of offering enough fresh, acute perceptions of the current scene for an animation film, even a short one. Someone has recently noted that reality has become so surreal and Kafka-esque that fiction can no longer compete with it. What is said of fiction might also be said of graphics and caricature. The trouble with Scarfe's vision of the United States for me was that his images are hardly fresh insights, as these aspects of U.S. life have been attacked for years by Americans in American and even more savagely. He uses tropes such as John Wayne's shooting Indians, an U.S. eagle's turning into a vulture, and Mickey Mouse, symbol of square U.S. values, becoming a scrofulous hippy with Nixon-like features from the effects of drugs and smog. To a BBC audience the film may appear to be fresh, biting satire, but to these U.S. eyes it seems late and redundant. Incidentally, although Scarfe won the "first film" award, he doesn't

appear to be an entire newcomer to the field. The British *Who's Who* lists him as director of animation and film for the BBC in 1969.

The festival fell under several shadows, one of which was the Walt Disney retrospective offered every afternoon to large audiences that included swarms of delighted small Croatians. Viewing Disney in conjunction with the "best" of contemporary animation brought a sharp reminder that for all the chic sneers at Disney's slickness, sentimentality and other shortcomings, he achieved an unsurpassed perfection in his particular genre that has no real counterpart in contemporary animation. The Disney tradition was also strongly present in some of the competition films, notably the Russian and Japanese films for children. I found these films terribly dull, but I am not a child and perhaps children like them, as someone must believe.

Another shadow was cast by the other retrospectives, especially the great puppet films of Bretislav Pojar, the Czechoslovak animator who served on the international jury at Zagreb. This retrospective, and those of Bob Godfrey, Great Britain (all the films aging well and as funny as when they were first released); Fodor Hitruk, USSR; and John Hubley, USA (Faith Hubley was President of this year's jury), were screened in a neighboring theater.

Lastly there was the shadow of the Zagreb animators themselves, whose intelligence, talent and wit did so much to release animated film from its rigid theatrical molds. If anyone would like to know more about the Zagreb contribution, he should read Ron Holloway's *Z Is for Zagreb*. While Zagreb was well represented in the festival films, the dimensions of its historic contribution to animation could be felt mainly in the ambience in which the festival was held and in several concurrent exhibitions in Zagreb of the art of the Zagreb animators. The festival is an object of Croatian national pride, in addition to its obvious benefits to publicity and tourism. It's a fact recognized in the funding of the festival by numerous government agencies and by business and industries. A Croatian factory, indeed, rescued the festival at the very last moment before the festival was to open.

Makers of animated film seem to enjoy an exceptional camaraderie. I think this is not only because of their common interests and problems but also because they are not a great threat to each other in the world market, such as it is. Clearly a leading problem of animators is the fact that sophisticated theater audiences for sophisticated animation films are in short supply. Most of the talent and energy of animators now goes into titles for long films, television commercials, assembly-line Saturday morning cartoons, and propaganda, promotion and educational films produced for business, school authorities, and foundations that are cool to the "art" of animation in its more unorthodox and mind-bending forms. Many festival films, in fact, are labors of love produced by animators more or less on their own time without much hope of profit or of circulation except to festivals and to university and other cinema societies. This is less true in Eastern Europe, where graphic arts skills

are highly developed, there are traditions of cerebral and philosophic wit, and governments have recognized a possibility, both for economic and the other reasons, to compete with other nations and win national prestige. I came to Zagreb from Hungary, where a studio employee in Budapest complained to me that animation filmmakers were greater prima donnas than the directors of feature films.

Other jury prizes were awarded to THE LEGEND OF JOHN HENRY, Sam Weis, USA; THE BIRD'S LIFE, by Macourek, Daubrava and Born, Czechoslovakia, in which a woman is liberated from her life of drudgery on wings provided by a magician; SYSIPHUS, by Marcell Jankovics, Hungary, a funny, well-drawn film in which the frantic labors of Sisyphus end with a switcheroo—the huge rock stays in place; THE FLIGHT OF ICARUS, by Georges Schwizgebel, Switzerland; COLOUR IN CHAINS, by Pierre Davidovici, France; ANIMATION PIE, by Robert Bloomberg, USA, a lighthearted “how-to-do- it” on animation; THE FOX AND THE RABBIT, by J. Norstejn, Soviet Union; ZAGOR AND THE MUSICAL GLASS, by P.L. DeMas, Italy; CAT'S CRADLE, by Paul Driessen, Canada; THE LAST CARTOON MAN, by Jeffrey Hale, USA; HOW WOMEN SOLD THEIR HUSBANDS, by I. Gurvic, Soviet Union; TYRANNY, by Philippe Fausten, France; TAKING OFF, by Reina Raamat, Estonia, USSR; and ANIMATED FILMS FROM CAPE DORSET, by some Canadian Eskimos, which won a special jury award for ingenuity.

Some weaknesses of the films at Zagreb included the anecdotal character of many of the films (slight animated jokes), and the persistence of graphic and aural clichés, among them endless bodies and other objects traveling at high speed through clouds, stars and space, and the repetition of familiar sound effects. All animators should study the sound effects catalogued by Bob Godfrey in his DO IT YOURSELF CARTOON KIT and never use any of them again, ever.

My tender personal memories of Zagreb include TYRANNY and EIN LEBEN. TYRANNY, which won a prize, has a well-worn theme, the agony of an intellectual's body and soul imprisoned by the authorities of church and state. But the pointillist-like drawing (the film is in black and white), the quivering fluidity of the images, and the mood created by these devices seemed to me to be deeply felt, and the theme is never, alas, out of date. EIN LEBEN (Wonderful Life) by a West Berliner, Herbert Schramm, wasn't rewarded by the jury, but I thought it an exceptionally wry and sardonic commentary on the journey of man from the birth canal to the grave. It was a kind of Seven Ages of Man translated into a mechanistic and gently absurd progress—which life may indeed be.

## Notes

1. The Third International Animated Film Festival will be held in New York City in 1975. The Zagreb festival has been alternating with one in Annecy, France.

## Sources

Very few of these films have distributors in the usual sense, therefore the following is a list of sources or producers of the films mentioned. For assistance in booking foreign films, the cultural attaché in that nation's ambassador's office may be helpful. Figures after the name of the film are for running time in minutes and seconds.

- DIARY. 8:30. Zagreb Film, Zagreb, Yugoslavia.
- THE LEGEND OF JOHN HENRY. 10:46. Nick Bosustow & David Adams, Santa Monica, Ca.
- SECOND CLASS PASSENGER. 10:30. Zagreb Film, Zagreb, Yugoslavia.
- THE BIRD'S LIFE. 9:09. Ústředni Půjčovna Filmu, Prague, Czechoslovakia.
- TYRANNY. 8:15. Phillippe Fausten. Société Phar 3, Reims, France.
- SISYPHUS. 2:56. Pannonia Film Studio, Budapest, Hungary.
- HOW WOMEN SOLD THEIR HUSBANDS. 9:39. Kijevnaucfilm. Kijev, USSR.
- ANIMATION PIE. 25:30. Robert Bloomberg, Oakland, Ca.
- THE CRUNCH BIRD. 2:00. Ted Petok, Detroit, Mich.
- THE FOX AND THE HARE. 12:05. Sojuzmultfilm, Moscow, USSR.
- ANIMATION FROM CAPE DORSET. 7:00, National Film Board of Canada, Montreal.
- THE LONG DRAWN-OUT TRIP. 19:27. British Broadcasting Corporation, London, England.
- EIN LEBEN, 2:12. Uranus Film Produktion, Berlin, GFR.
- THE FLIGHT OF ICARUS. 2:58. G.D.S. Carouge, Switzerland.
- COLOUR IN CHAINS. 2:08. Atelier d'Animation d'Annecy, Annecy, France.
- ZAGOR AND THE MUSICAL GLASS. 6:27. Audiovisivi Demas S.R.L., Milan, Italy.
- CAT'S CRADLE. 10:15. National Film Board of Canada, Montreal.
- THE LAST CARTOON MAN. 4:00. Hale-Lamb Productions, Mill Valley, Ca.
- TAKING OFF. 8:54, Talinfil, Talin, USSR.
- THE LINE. 2:53. Yannis Koutsoyris and Nassos Mirmiridis, Athens, Greece.